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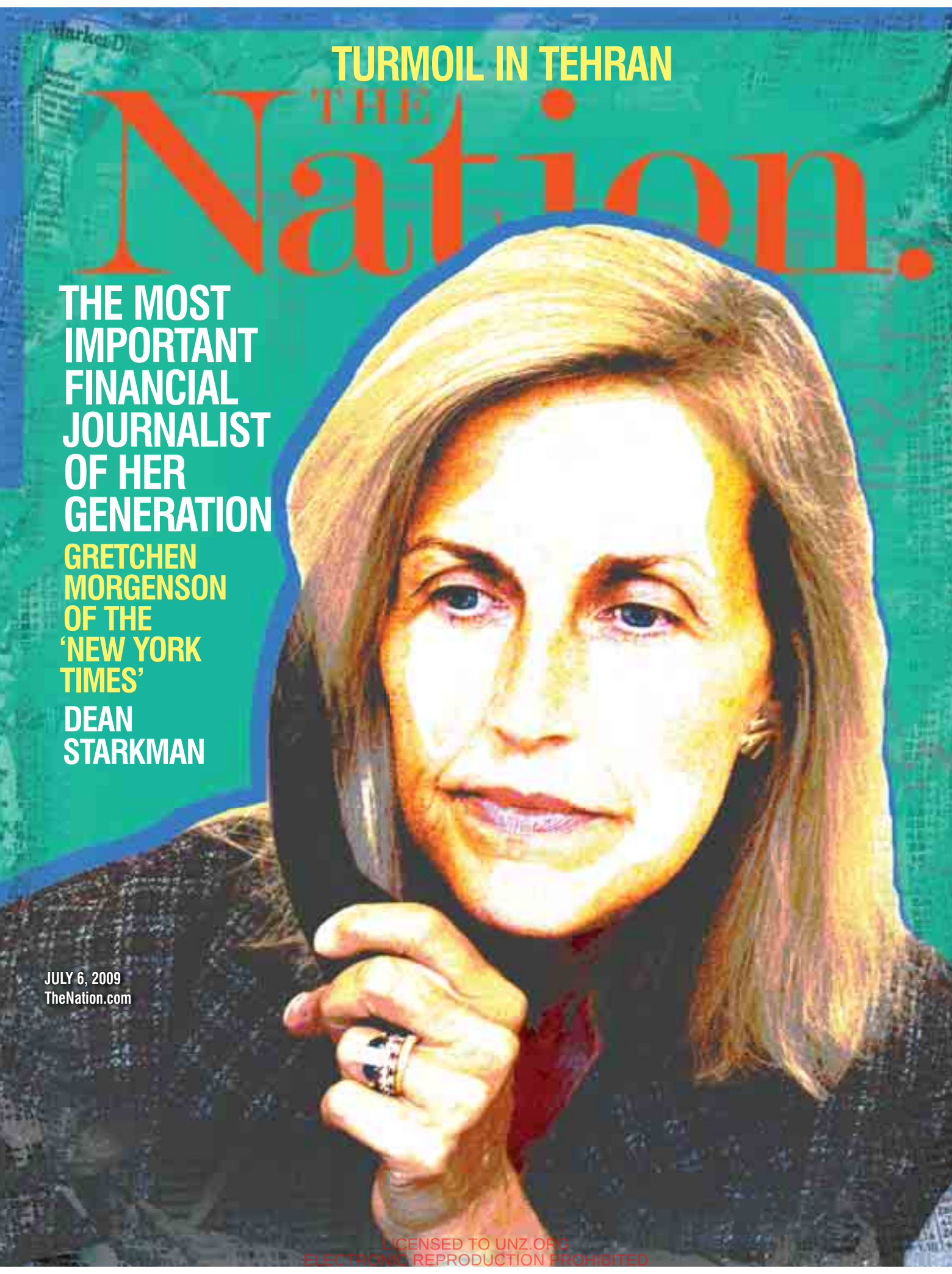

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Letters

Invade the Caymans!

McMurray, Pa.
I have a fundraising suggestion based on David Cay Johnston's insightful "Lax Little Islands" [June 1]. Johnson's idea that we should invade the Cayman Islands is a good one, and the timing is right. So I suggest that *The Nation*, with Johnston, embark on a project to print and sell banners that can be hung on homes throughout America proclaiming Invade the Caymans! This could create viral pressure on Congress to set aside its umbilical connections to Big Finance and Big Corporate and perhaps, for a change, do something for *big citizen*.
John Hemington

George Town, Grand Cayman, B.W.I.
There is so much misinformation in David Cay Johnston's "Lax Little Islands," it's hard to know where to start. His most egregious claim is that the Caymans are a haven for criminals and others who want to escape taxes and launder money. This is patently false. Unlike Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Andorra and Monaco, the financial sector in the Caymans operates under full transparency to access monies for the benefit of the US economy. For the past twenty years, the Caymans have worked cooperatively on every international initiative from the United States, the IMF, the OECD and the FATF to create a robust, accountable, transparent and fair financial regulatory structure, frequently inspected by the IMF. More specifically to Johnston's claim, in 1990 Cayman entered into a fully transparent, all-crimes Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty with the United States and, in 2001, a comprehensive US Tax Information Exchange Agreement.

The GAO report corroborates and is highly supportive of the Cayman position. We agree that those who break the law should be punished, so it is irresponsible to suggest that the Caymans are aiding and abetting such activity. The Justice Department will confirm that. Offshore centers enable US companies—which pay tax twice, in the States and where they earn profits—to compete internationally and reinvest their profits, expand their operations and create jobs. Last time I checked, this was a good thing.
Anthony Travers, *Cayman Islands Financial Services Association*

Johnston Replies

Rochester, N.Y.
There is so much misinformation in Anthony Travers's letter, it's hard to know where to start. There is no double taxation, since Congress gives companies a dollar-for-dollar credit for taxes paid in foreign regions. Further, transfer pricing abuses let companies take profits in the Caymans while paying little or no tax to *any* government. The GAO report, read in context, hardly supports the claims made above; cooperation is conditioned on the US government having first identified a cheat or crook and then asking for assistance, at which point cooperation begins. By the most generous measure, the Caymans government budget (see link at TheNation.com) devotes less than a penny on the dollar to financial crimes law enforcement, which the GAO report states the Caymans see as mostly a domestic American problem. Cheating the United States tax system is not a crime in the Caymans, which despite their denials profit by fostering evasion.
David Cay Johnston

How We Lost Universal Healthcare

Bethesda, Md.
An addendum to Nelson Lichtenstein's "Time for Another Reuther Plan" [June 1]: in 1968 Walter Reuther announced the organization of the Committee for National Health Insurance and enlisted 100 leading Americans to join in working toward a single-payer health insurance system. He recruited me as executive director of the Committee of 100 for National Health Insurance (we had first met as members of President Kennedy's Medi-

(continued on page 24)

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Turmoil in Tehran

As we go to press, Iran is poised on a knife-edge between continued demonstrations by outraged supporters of presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Moussavi and brutal repression and the re-establishment of order by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Basij militia and Revolutionary Guard. The world is watching in suspense as the next chapter in the future of the Islamic Republic unfolds.

EDITORIAL

Only a few hours after the close of polling in Iran's tumultuous election season, it seemed evident that the fix was in. The regime shut down blogs, e-mail and text-messaging services, the streets were filled with security forces and incumbent hardliner Ahmadinejad was declared the landslide winner.

It was difficult not to see this hasty announcement, as well as Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's public congratulations to Ahmadinejad only a day later, as a clumsy cover for blatant fraud. How could so many millions of votes in a record turnout be counted so quickly, in a country that has always taken days to announce initial results? How could challenger Moussavi, an Azeri, have been so soundly defeated in his own ethnic region? How could fourth-place finisher Mehdi Karroubi—who received more than 5 million votes in the 2005 election—have received less than 1 percent this time and failed to take his home province of Lorestan?

Ahmadinejad does seem to retain broad support, especially among Iran's poor voters and civil servants, the beneficiaries of government largesse stemming from windfall oil revenues. He has a strong base among social conservatives, voters fed up with government corruption and those suspicious of an opening to the West. And he seems to have a lock on the huge cohort of Revolutionary Guard troops, Basij militia and police. So it's conceivable that he might have edged out Moussavi in a fair count or a runoff. But in the absence of any independent election observer—the Interior Ministry, controlled by Ahmadinejad, has a record of tampering—it's impossible to know for sure. Ahmadinejad's arrogant assertion of raw power has torn the mask off what were always deep, systemic limitations on popular participation and decision-making in the Islamic Republic.

It was that arrogance and contempt that helped fuel the rage of hundreds of thousands of Iranians, who poured into the streets of Tehran and other cities, demanding that their votes be counted and chanting "*Marg bar dictator!*" (Death to the dictator!) and "*Allah-o-akbar!*" It has been the greatest upsurge of popular protest since the 1979 revolution. It may be over-hyped, but Twitter and other new technologies have sharpened solidarity among the opposition and have been a crucial source of information to the outside world. The regime's revocation of foreign press credentials and ban on reporting from the streets make this guerrilla journalism all the more important.

What accounts for the extraordinary spirit of opposition among a population that until recently seemed to have given up on electoral politics? Part of the answer lies in the peculiar nature of Moussavi's coalition. One wing of it consists of key sectors of the business community and veterans of the Islamic Revolution, many of them former stalwarts like Moussavi himself, or establishment figures like former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who have lost patience with Ahmadinejad's belligerent posturing on the world stage and his incompetent management of the economy. They fear

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COVER DESIGN BY GENE CASE & STEPHEN KLING/AVENGING ANGELS; ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIM ROBINSON

VOLUME 289, NUMBER 1, JULY 6, 2009
PRINTED JUNE 17

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SUBMISSIONS: Queries only, no manuscripts. Go to www.thenation.com and click on "about," then "submissions" for a query form. Queries may be mailed to The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. SASE for poems.

INTERNET: Selections from the current issue become available Thursday night at www.thenation.com.

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This week at TheNation.com

News & Analysis

Robert Dreyfuss: Talking to Ahmadinejad
Dave Zirin: Iran's soccer metaphor
Eyal Press: Obama and Iran
Tom Hayden: El Salvador rising

VideoNation: Michael Moore
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the fundamentalist clique centered around Ahmadinejad and the security forces, whose growing power poses a threat to sectors of the clerical establishment and who make a rapprochement with the West—desired by business interests that crave foreign investment—harder to achieve. These fissures at the very center of power have created space for another wing of the coalition, consisting of liberals, women's rights activists and a growing middle class that had backed former president Mohammad Khatami. The energy in the streets is powered by the large demographic of younger, well-educated Iranians eager to cast off the shackles of clerical rule and establish democracy.

Another source of the new inspiration in Iran comes from Washington. As *Nation* contributing editor Robert Dreyfuss has pointed out (see "Talking to Ahmadinejad" and other recent online dispatches he filed from Iran during and just after the election), Iran's reformers have been heartened by President Obama's conciliatory approach to Tehran and his disavowal of foreign interference in Iranian politics. This has enabled them to challenge both the clerical establishment and the growing power of the security forces without opening themselves to charges that they are the pawns of Washington. Like millions throughout the Muslim and Arab worlds, Iranians listened closely to Obama's Cairo speech and applauded his strong support for democracy and for a new US administration that "does not presume to know what is best for everyone."

Obama's response to the election crisis has been a model of restraint and realism and a relief from the ham-handed, threatening posture of the Bush administration. Obama accurately observed that "the easiest way for reactionary forces inside Iran to crush reformers is to say it's the US that is encouraging those reformers," and that even if Moussavi had won, Iranian policy on the key issues affecting US relations, including Tehran's nuclear program and its support for Hezbollah and Hamas, would not be all that different. If repression of the opposition intensifies in Iran, Obama will come under growing pressure from hardliners here to interfere in that country's politics. Nothing could be more damaging to the cause of Iranian democracy and freedom.

The Compensation Hustle

Mid-June saw Executive Compensation Week here in Washington. On June 11 the House Financial Services Committee convened a hearing on Compensation Structure and Systemic Risk, just one day after the administration announced that attorney Ken Feinberg (lately of the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund) would serve as the "Special Master" overseeing executive compensation at firms receiving TARP funds. His vaguely kinky title notwithstanding, early reports suggest Feinberg won't be imposing much discipline on naughty execs. "Our people kind of thought it was a nonevent," a bank executive told the *Washington Post*.

But all the attention on bonuses for executives at TARP firms obscures a much bigger issue, one touched on but never suffi-

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Noted.

ANTIWAR DEMS WHIPPED: There's no way to put a positive spin on a House vote in which Democrats—many of whom were elected as antiwar candidates—provided the overwhelming majority of support for allocating $106 billion in additional funds to maintain the occupation of Iraq and expand the US presence in Afghanistan. But what made the June 16 vote on the supplemental appropriations bill (226-202) doubly disappointing was the fact that the Obama administration and its Congressional allies attached a measure that enables the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to extend its line of credit by $100 billion—with the actual cost to the United States estimated at around $5 billion but potentially much more.

The IMF, with its long history of structurally adjusting poor countries into deeper poverty, deserves no favors from the United States, as the antipoverty advocacy group **RESULTS** made abundantly clear during the debate. And as economist **Dean Baker** has noted, much of this latest money will likely be used to bail out European banks. So why would progressive Democrats back this bad bill? Immense pressure from the White House and Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** got 221 Democrats to sign on, including almost a score of progressives who had opposed a previous version of the supplemental.

To their credit, thirty-two Democrats voted "no" for the right reasons—mostly opposition to the direction of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars but also frustration with backdoor bank bailouts. Ohio Congressman **Dennis Kucinich** and California's **Bob Filner** get high marks for raising the alarm about the IMF line of credit in a letter to colleagues. But the real heroes were the freshmen members—such as Colorado's **Jared Polis** and Maine's **Chellie Pingree**—who withstood some of the most aggressive lobbying yet by an administration that, at least on issues of war and global finance, could do with a lot more checking and balancing from Congress.

JOHN NICHOLS

GREENLAND'S LEFT TURN: On June 2 the incongruous forces of global warming and indigenous self-determination combined to bring the leftist **Inuit Ataqatigiit Party** (IA) to power in Greenland, forcing a social democratic/conservative coalition out of office on the eve of the nation's transition to self-rule. Greenland, a semiautonomous Arctic province of Denmark with a population of about 57,600, has been disproportionately affected by global warming, which has made large swaths of its permafrost-covered landmass increasingly accessible to oil and mineral exploration for the first time.

Emboldened by the prospect of resource-driven self-sufficiency, more than 75 percent of Greenland voters opted in November for increased devolution from Denmark, which has controlled the country since the early eighteenth century. Self-rule measures, including greater control over natural resources and a switch from Danish to Greenlandic as the national language, are due to come into effect on June 21 and will likely pave the way for a vote on full independence in the near future. In advance of Greenland's empowerment, former Prime Minister **Hans Enoksen** of the social democratic **Siumut Party**, which had run the island since it was granted limited autonomy in 1979, called an early election because, "it seems fitting to ask the people who should lead them into that new epoch."

Greenlanders chose to award a plurality—fourteen of thirty-one seats in the Parliament—to the pro-independence IA Party. Speaking in the capital, Nuuk, where close to a quarter of the island's population lives, IA leader **Kuupik Kleist** told jubilant supporters, "Greenland deserves this."

CORBIN HIAR

FREE SPEECH TV: Starting June 29 HBO will broadcast a documentary featuring libel lawyer **Martin Garbus**. *Shouting Fire: Stories From the Edge of Free Speech*, directed by Garbus's daughter **Liz Garbus** (1998 Academy Award nominee for *The Farm: Angola, USA*; she also directed *The Nazi Officer's Wife* and produced *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*), describes the state of free speech in America, with Martin Garbus serving as guide. Among the subjects: the case of **Ward Churchill**, the University of Colorado professor who was brought up on academic charges for his caustic comments on victims of 9/11 and for alleged plagiarism.

SINGLE-PAYER PLAYER: When **Dr. Linda Farley** said, "The uninsured die because they don't have insurance," she knew of what she spoke. An emeritus professor in the pioneering Department of Family Medicine at the University of Wisconsin, Dr. Farley "retired" in 1992 to work virtually full time as a volunteer physician in community health centers and to supervise medical students at a Salvation Army clinic for the homeless. That work—combined with her long experience providing care on Indian reservations, managing inner-city clinics and rural medical practices, and helping set up training programs for doctors and nurses in the United States and abroad—led Dr. Farley to become one of the country's most passionate advocates of single-payer healthcare.

Along with her friend and comrade **Dr. Quentin Young**, Dr. Farley (and her husband, Gene, also a doctor) helped build **Physicians for a National Health Care Program** from a small circle of activists into a movement of 16,000 healthcare professionals that is now at the forefront of real healthcare reform. Active to the last days of her battle with cancer, which took her life on June 9 at age 80, Dr. Farley followed the current debate with a mix of hope and frustration. She delighted in the activism of younger physicians—some of whom were arrested in protests seeking to force Congress to put single-payer on the table. But with the wisdom of a movement elder, she warned against half-steps and compromises. "The doctors who have been on the front lines can tell you," Dr. Farley said, "there's only one real 'public option.' It's single-payer."

JOHN NICHOLS

NING NATION: The **Nation Associates**, a long-thriving group of *Nation* supporters, has entered the digital world with a robust social networking site powered by **Ning**, a popular new online service. This network, a community of the magazine's readers who gather online to discuss issues and share activist strategies with like-minded people, will also regularly feature position papers developed by the many Nation Associates discussion groups operating coast to coast. The first report, published by the lively Michigan discussion group, chronicles ways to fix our broken electoral system. Read it at nationdiscussion.ning.com.

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ciently investigated during the hearing: how to recalibrate the share of gains captured by shareholders, executives and workers in the post-crash economy.

So far, there hasn't been much progress on that front. In fact, corporate governance expert Nell Minow says that, counterintuitively, massive future payouts for CEOs are being "spring-loaded" into the system. "They're resetting all their benchmarks and options grants at what they know is a low point," she says, "so that when the market comes back they are going to rise with the market, having done nothing themselves. That's what we saw in the '90s: up to 70 percent [of gains from stock options] are attributable to market gains as a whole, and yet executives argue it's pay for performance."

The focus on limiting outsize payouts isn't simply about populist backlash or a basic sense of fairness (though those are perfectly good reasons for it). The pre-crash mushrooming of executive pay in the finance sector almost certainly helped bring about the crisis. "Incentives for short-term gains," Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner said the day Feinberg's appointment was announced, "overwhelmed the checks and balances meant to mitigate…the risk of excess leverage."

Bloated CEO salaries aren't exactly new, but why they persist is harder to explain than you might think. Every dollar paid to an executive above his or her actual worth comes from the pockets of the shareholders. And while workers may be too beaten down to fight back, investors aren't exactly a powerless class in America. Why, then, do they allow clubby compensation committees and consultants to pick their pockets?

Part of the problem is the raw difficulty of figuring out how much value a particular CEO adds to a company. There's also a legal structure that attenuates shareholder power. But there's a deeper issue. CEO pay is to corporate governance what farm subsidies are to the federal government: the benefit accrues to a small group (CEOs or big agricultural concerns like Monsanto) while the cost—whether to shareholders or taxpayers—is shared widely.

It's a "collective choice problem," according to Minow. "The amount of time and energy that anybody spends to read through this impenetrable prose," she says of the details of a compensation package, "is never going to be paid back by the fractional share" of the savings. Economists call it "rational apathy."

Against this backdrop, what you end up with is a whole lot of corrupt, elite self-dealing, which is the emerging through line of our benighted age. "The boards tend to be dominated by CEOs and other high corporate executives of other firms, who have an interest in keeping executive compensation high," wrote Judge Richard Posner on his blog last year. They are "abetted by compensation consultants who naturally recommend generous compensation packages to directors who are recipients of generous compensation and therefore believe that the CEOs of the companies on whose boards they sit should be paid top dollar."

How to stop it? The administration has thus far endorsed two good but relatively minimal reforms: "say on pay" legislation, similar to what they have in Britain, which allows stockholders to hold a nonbinding vote; and measures to strengthen the independence of the compensation committees.

There's a whole lot more that could be done. In all but a few cases, company directors need only receive a single shareholder vote to stay on the board. If this were converted into a majority threshold, it might impose some discipline. The SEC could require, as a regulatory matter, listed companies to institute clawback policies, which would allow the board to recoup compensation that arises from short-term gains followed by big long-term losses. Perhaps most intriguing, Minow points out that the Labor Department is charged with overseeing employee benefit funds, which, she notes, are the largest accumulation of capital in America. "If the Labor Department insisted that pension fund votes were based on what was best for plan beneficiaries," she says, "instead of what was best for corporate managers," director elections might actually start to matter.

As needed as many of these reforms are, whatever rules are put in place, CEOs will have massive incentives to skirt them. Which is why, finally, much of the solution must be found in the tax code. In 1980, before Ronald Reagan inaugurated the supply-side counterrevolution in taxation, the top rate for individuals was 70 percent. When taxation took 70 cents of every dollar made above a certain amount, there was far less incentive to game the system for giant payouts. By 1988, though, the rate was 28 percent. It has fluctuated between 30 percent and 35 percent under the past two presidents, while capital gains and other wealth taxes have steadily declined.

During the financial services hearing, as Republican after Republican railed against the specter of government bureaucrats micromanaging pay—down to "secretaries and janitors" in the fevered imagination of Illinois Representative Judy Biggert—part of me wondered if perhaps they had a point. Regulating executive compensation might have the same balloon-squeezing effect as bonus caps. And besides, it's easier for executives to game the compensation committee and shareholders than the IRS. So maybe we should let executives make as much as they can wrangle. We just need to make sure we then tax the hell out of them.

CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

The Private Thoughts Of a TV Anchor as He Observes the Iranian Election

A president like Moussavi
Would fill me to the brim with glee:
For anchors not completely lame,
It's easy to pronounce his name.
But this was not to be. Oh, God—
I'm stuck with Ahmadinejad.

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Ban's Way

COMMENT

Here is some of what the secretary general of the United Nations did in May: helped coordinate UN responses to the H1N1 virus in New York and Geneva, where he also attended a World Heath Organization assembly and persuaded heads of pharmaceutical companies to donate vaccines; addressed a summit in Bahrain on dealing with disasters; met with Congressional committees to discuss UN funding decisions; visited the last battlefield in the ugly quarter-century war in Sri Lanka and toured a camp for displaced Tamils, then prodded Sri Lanka's president to hasten relief and reconciliation; urged global business executives in Copenhagen to act on climate change; and held twenty-one meetings in one day with various Danish leaders and environmental experts before moving on to an official visit to Finland.

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is halfway through his first five-year term in office. Whether he gets another five years will depend not on how many air miles he logs but on what all this activity achieves. From his perspective, he is laying the diplomatic groundwork for shared problem-solving, not looking for instant results. He does not showboat.

Ban, who previously served as the South Korean foreign minister, is all but unknown in the United States. The UN is getting less and less coverage from fewer American reporters at its headquarters. But the United States, as always, will decide the secretary general's fate. Bill Clinton dumped Boutros Boutros-Ghali after one term when the too-foreign Egyptian was perceived as a political liability. Kofi Annan endured shrill calls for his resignation after branding the US-led invasion of Iraq "illegal" and opening himself to a revenge attack over a corrupt "oil-for-food" program that had fed Iraqis under sanctions. Though cleared of corruption charges by an independent investigation, he suffered considerable physical and emotional damage, and the scandal tainted the final months of his tenure.

Not much is known about the relationship between the Obama administration and Ban, a George W. Bush/John Bolton candidate. But UN officials sense that there are unresolved questions within the National Security Council and between the NSC and the State Department and Pentagon over how to deal with the organization on human rights and international law. President Obama, who as a campaigner talked about marching to the thirty-eighth floor of UN headquarters to announce to the secretary general that the United States was back, has not done that; nor did he endorse the UN with much enthusiasm after he met briefly with Ban at the White House on March 10. But Assistant Secretary General Robert Orr, Ban's political adviser and an American, says that Ban "has no enemies" in Washington.

The secretary general's best friends seem to be in Congress, where committees are chipping away at US debt to the UN and have restored contributions to its Population Fund. A new US focus on climate change and clean energy is playing to Ban's agenda and drawing in environmental activists who might not normally have put much stock in UN leadership. Congressional leaders also appreciated Ban's reprimanding Mahmoud Ahmadinejad after the Iranian president delivered a vitriolic anti-Israel speech at a racism conference in Geneva this spring.

Ban feels most comfortable and useful in the role of global noodge and pivotal player among nations and nongovernmental actors. A genial man given to informality who has been known to break into ditties or self-deprecating humor at sedate dinners, he is neither a charismatic figure nor a spellbinding speaker. He tries to cement his position a little wonkily through issues, with the world financial crisis sharing the top of the priority list with global warming. That doesn't attract the personality-driven media, certainly not television (except the BBC). Perhaps this is why he is not infrequently overshadowed by the more theatrical Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, the General Assembly president from Sandinista Nicaragua, who has brought disgraced capitalism to the fore in a series of large, well-publicized events.

Diego Arria, a former Venezuelan ambassador to the UN (who devised the informal Security Council meetings known as the "Arria formula," which allow more voices to be heard), says that Ban's low-key style may be his strength, since most powerful nations prefer a secretary general who does not make himself a strong international figure. Arria also said that a lifetime in the Korean foreign ministry would imbue anyone with a respect for hierarchy and a preference for consensus-building over confrontation.

Ban has dismayed diplomats with a closed-door approach to decision-making that cuts out anyone beyond his inner circle. Experts he consults say they can't be sure he digests their advice. A European ambassador called Ban's office "opaque," and there are persistent complaints from outside the organization that a small coterie of fellow Koreans—the most important of whom is Kim Won-soo, Ban's deputy chief of staff—appear to be his sole confidants. Ban's chief of staff, Vijay Nambiar, a skilled Indian former ambassador, vigorously denies rumors that he has considered resigning in frustration.

Ban has made some inexplicable high-level appointments. Thomas Weiss, director of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies at the City University of New York's Graduate Center and author of a new book, *What's Wrong With the United Nations and How to Fix It*, calls the choice of Asha-Rose Migiro of Tanzania as deputy secretary general "puzzling," given that the office was designed for overseeing internal management and Migiro had no management experience. Fair or not, lapses in UN management are hauled out when isolationist critics go on the attack.

In geopolitics, Ban could still have much to contribute. As the architect of Seoul's "sunshine policy" of opening to the North Koreans, he could offer insight on the current nuclear crisis. A well-known figure in Asia, he harbors hopes of negotiating the release of activist Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma. His relations with China are good—he speaks Chinese, Japanese and Hindi as well as English, French and German.

Ban may be an unassuming, soft-spoken diplomat, but he is tough when necessary and capable of taking on momentarily thorny challenges (like the latest Israeli-Palestinian crisis) and

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long-range, new-generation issues (like climate change and global economic readjustment) at the same time, and with a focus on the poorest countries. He was the first international figure to see the damage done in Gaza after the recent Israeli attacks. "He stood in the smoking rubble and said, Just stop now," his speechwriter, Michael Meyer, recalled. A UN inquiry ordered by Ban found $11 million in often deliberate damage to UN buildings and demanded Israeli compensation. For the rest of this year, Ban will turn to the task of corralling agreement on a still elusive new global pact on carbon emissions. He has been to the Antarctic to see the shrinking ice shelves and will go to the North Pole this summer. He plans a summit-level meeting in New York in September to prepare for a December climate change conference in Copenhagen.

Speaking to the 2009 graduating class at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Ban said, "This new world demands a special brand of leadership…global leadership…. We need new vision." He seems to have a candidate in mind for the task.

BARBARA CROSSETTE

Barbara Crossette is The Nation*'s United Nations correspondent.*

Healthcare Pushback

COMMENT

Vincent Panvini Sr. is one of those Washington insiders whose names seldom appear in the newspapers but can be found in hundreds of Rolodexes on Capitol Hill. He is the guy in charge of political contributions for the Sheet Metal Workers union. In the 2008 election, Panvini handed out almost $2.4 million, 97 percent of which went to Democrats. Panvini's choices will change, he predicts, if the Democratic Party decides to reform healthcare on the backs of union members—taxing the health benefits that working people won in collective bargaining by forgoing wage increases.

"This is a political train wreck waiting to happen," Panvini warns. In recent weeks he has been bluntly informing party leaders that they are flirting with a disaster comparable to the great wipeout Democrats suffered in 1994, when Gingrich Republicans won control of the House.

Policy thinkers and rightward-leaning "Blue Dog" Democrats look upon the proposal as a tempting opportunity to raise lots of revenue for healthcare reform, which the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office recently estimated could cost as much as $1.6 trillion over ten years. Limiting existing tax exemptions could produce more than $418 billion in the same span of time, according to the Joint Taxation Committee, a significant down payment.

Problem is, a big switch on taxing benefits would double-cross a major constituency and break some important promises. During the presidential campaign, Obama attacked John McCain for proposing the very same idea. Obama further promised he would not increase taxes on the middle class. "If you tax health benefits, you are taxing the middle class," Panvini explains. The issue was critical, he adds, in persuading many white working-class voters to put aside racial fears and return to the Democratic Party.

If the president embraces the plan, the consequences, Panvini thinks, could be explosive. "If any of these Democratic senators vote for this, they will be voted out in 2010, and this will definitely be used against Obama in 2012. People are already hurting, unemployed—and then you are going to tax them more? That's crazy."

The conventional view of the 1994 election is that voters were reacting to Bill Clinton's failure to reform healthcare. But labor's interpretation, which I share, is that working people felt betrayed and abandoned by Clinton's rightward turn toward NAFTA and Robert Rubin's Wall Street economics. Many working people stayed home in 1994; some even opted for Newt Gingrich's anti-establishment attack line.

Given Obama's great popularity, rebellion seems remote in the current circumstances. But that could change if the party once again turns its back on core constituencies. If Democratic senators sell out labor on healthcare reform, Panvini expects he will make different choices on whom the Sheet Metal Workers support. "No question about it, I would back people against some Democrats," he said. "But it's not up to me. The members themselves will get their revenge. I won't have to stir up anything."

The White House is trying to reassure labor groups, but President Obama has not yet ruled out the approach, and a labor coalition has already formed to push back. On June 8 thirty-one unions sent a joint letter to Congress warning against the proposal. If the campaign gains steam, labor leaders may find more allies among the estimated 160 million Americans who receive health coverage through the workplace. And they may also help galvanize the progressive groups—including Health Care for America Now and MoveOn—that are rolling out an $82 million campaign to push for a strong public health insurance plan.

The real source of labor's alarm—and the target of much of the pushback—is Senate Finance Committee chair Max Baucus, who has repeatedly described as promising a limit on healthcare tax benefits and has expressed qualms about the "public plan" option. Baucus has a history of ignoring the party's agenda and collaborating with "Rat Republicans," as Panvini calls them (see my "Senator Sellout," June 2, 2006, at TheNation.com).

"Basically, this is coming from Baucus," Panvini said. "He and [Republican Senator Chuck] Grassley are…not backing off. He might even have the votes in his committee. Baucus thinks this is the lazy way to get the money."

Conservative critics like to complain that union members enjoy "Cadillac" healthcare while other working people get little or no help from the government. This a valid point, and it ought to be addressed. But the solution is not to cripple the union members who have decent benefits. An equitable solution would set out, rather, to make everyone whole.

The only way to overcome the anomaly of union-employer healthcare plans is to create a single-payer system that is effective and national in scope. Instead of targeting workers with slash-and-burn politics, policy-makers should look to organized labor's accomplishments as the model for healthcare reform.

WILLIAM GREIDER

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Eric Alterman

The Triumph of Williams's *Tragedy*

William Appleman Williams's *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* is one of those rare works of history that can credibly be said to have changed history itself. Released in 1959 by the obscure World Publishing Company, *Tragedy* ranks, as Lloyd Gardner notes in his introduction to the fiftieth-anniversary edition, as the "most influential exploration of American foreign policy attempted by a historian in the twentieth century." While Gardner is a proud leftist, cold war revisionist and former student of the author, this measure of Williams's influence is shared across the ideological spectrum. John Lewis Gaddis—whose views often track those of the US foreign policy establishment, more recently its neoconservative wing—laments that historians "have allowed Williams' 'tragic' perspective to obscure our vision.... We have transformed what was, in its day, a profoundly unorthodox criticism of conventional wisdom into an orthodoxy that has now become conventional wisdom."

What's so striking about *Tragedy*'s lasting impact is that it was a full frontal attack on almost everything Americans believed about themselves, to say nothing of the heroic tales told about our nation's history in college classrooms. Williams—who began publishing in *The Nation* in the late 1950s—did not merely blame America's leaders for the imperfect execution of their overly idealistic ambitions, a common refrain since the end of Woodrow Wilson's presidency in 1921. As Bradford Perkins noted in 1984, Williams proffered a "fundamental assault on the merits of American objectives" themselves.

Tragedy sought to demonstrate that the American empire was no accident. Rather, it was the natural result of what Williams called the American *Weltanschauung*—a German term that combines a definition of the world with an explanation of the way it works. Andrew Bacevich, retired military officer and noted historian, defines it as follows:

> A tendency to equate anti-colonialism with opposition to empire as such…;
>
> An insistence that American values are universal values, leading to this corollary: "other peoples cannot really solve their problems and improve their lives unless they go about it in the same way as the United States";
>
> A…commitment to the principle of self-determination, informed by the conviction that "all peoples must ultimately self-determine themselves in the American Way if America itself is to be secure and prosperous"…;
>
> A penchant for externalizing evil…;
>
> A reflexive predilection for demonizing adversaries…;
>
> A belief that the American economy cannot function absent opportunities for external expansion…;
>
> A steady, if unacknowledged, drift toward militarization…;
>
> An unshakable confidence in American Exceptionalism and American beneficence….

It is important to underline one point that some leftist and anti-American ideologues often ignore: the *Weltanschauung* of America's self-understanding is neither cynical nor evil but is deeply felt by its proponents and proselytizers. "American leaders," Williams wrote, "believed deeply in the ideals they proclaimed."

However arguable Williams's assertions and debatable many of his premises may have been, *Tragedy* provided a kind of intellectual open door for American historians. The Wisconsin School he helped spawn included such luminaries in the field as Gardner, Walter LaFeber and Thomas McCormick, who would write their own pathbreaking studies and train their students to do the same. Williams opened up a path not only for a revisionist history of US foreign relations but also for the "post-revisionist" response it later inspired among more establishment-oriented historians, like Gaddis and Melvyn Leffler.

As Curt Cardwell of Drake University pointed out at a spirited conference recently convened at Rutgers University to mark the book's anniversary, orthodox historians may dispute the revisionists' narrative, but they do not dispute their facts: Leffler's 1992 work *A Preponderance of Power*, "still considered to be the definitive text on the origins of the cold war, agreed with the revisionists on virtually every particular and pressed his case often more forcefully than even the revisionists had." Leffler shared the revisionists' view that the Americans, not the Soviets, were the first to violate the Yalta Accords and that the US's portrait of its cold war actions as largely defensive does not hold up to even minimal scrutiny. Leffler disagrees with the revisionist view that an expanding US economy was the driving force behind much of America's cold war strategy. But as Cardwell noted, Secretary of State Dean Acheson explained in November 1949, a key moment in the period under dispute: "It cannot be too strongly emphasized that our exports must be maintained at the highest possible level."

Bacevich, who gave the conference's keynote address, argued quite correctly that "Williams's greatness lay as a historian, not as prophet or political philosopher." Williams's analysis grew increasingly shrill over time (and across revised editions of *Tragedy* published in 1962 and '72). In his later career Williams even advanced a proposal to break up the Union into a "federation of democratic Socialist communities." By 1980 he was predicting, "We will suffer what we did unto Hamburg, Dresden and Tokyo.... We will suffocate, sizzle and fry."

But to open up an entire nation's intellectual discourse is no mean feat. Voters have finally freed the nation from the brain-dead tyranny of some of the most egregious deceptions of the benighted Bush/Cheney era. Yet the *Weltanschauung* of that unhappy era awaits its *Tragedy*. ■

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THE MOST IMPORTANT FINANCIAL JOURNALIST OF HER GENERATION

GRETCHEN MORGENSON OF THE 'NEW YORK TIMES'

DEAN STARKMAN

On April 27, Lloyd Blankfein, chairman and chief executive of Goldman Sachs, sat down for a meeting at Goldman headquarters with Gretchen Morgenson, reporter, columnist and senior editor of the *New York Times*. The Wall Street titan and the Pulitzer Prize winner had never met, but this wasn't the usual polite getting-to-know-you session between reporter and source.

"I feel like I've been waterboarded," Blankfein told her, according to people familiar with the discussion. Blankfein was being dramatic, but he had reason to feel that way. It was Morgenson, after all, who had written the story this past fall that stripped the veil of secrecy from the most momentous closed-door deal in the annals of US finance: the government rescue of fallen insurance colossus American International Group. The September 28 story, "Behind Insurer's Crisis, a Blind Eye to a Web of Risk," was the first article published by a major news organization to reveal that the true beneficiaries of the bailout were the institutions to which AIG owed money, known as counterparties (mainly Wall Street investment banks). The 2,700-word piece said, among other things, that an AIG collapse "threatened to leave a hole of as much as $20 billion in Goldman's side" and that Blankfein attended a meeting at the Federal Reserve on September 15, the same day decisions were made to let Lehman Brothers fall and to save AIG.

Today this is common knowledge; until this story ran, though, it wasn't. The article was about as bold and valuable as business stories come and involved no small journalistic risks for the *Times*. Goldman, for instance, was able to wring a correction on the story and still feels wronged today. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, who was then president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, called Morgenson and her editor to question the article's premise, *The Nation* has learned. The piece has been the subject of endless parsing on financial blogs and, privately, sniping by Morgenson's peers. Was Goldman really exposed to AIG? And if so, how? Was it fair to mention Blankfein's presence at the Fed?

It would be too much to say that the story was all in a day's work for Morgenson. It was extraordinary. But it does open a window onto what makes Morgenson the most important financial journalist of her generation.

At 53, Morgenson is at the height of her career, read and feared in the corridors of power running from Wall Street to Washington. As a reporter and columnist (a controversial dual role), she is enormously productive. During the period following Lehman's bankruptcy, her byline appeared on major stories on Henry Cisneros and good housing goals gone bad, Merrill Lynch's collapse, corrupted rating agencies and Washington Mutual's boiler-room culture, in addition to the September 28

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blockbuster on AIG—not to mention weekly 1,200-word columns on everything from rating-agency hypocrisy ("They're Shocked, Shocked, About the Mess," October 26) to a convoluted tax deal that imperiled an Indiana electrical cooperative ("Just Call This Deal Hoosier Baroque," December 21).

She breaks business-press taboos constantly. Her prose is blunt; some even say crude. ("Everybody knows that executive compensation at many companies has been obscene. What everybody does not know is how obscene obscene is now," she wrote in February 2006 in a not untypical column.) Morgenson doesn't just cover subjects but sometimes hammers them into submission, as when she banged out more than three dozen stories on Countrywide in 2007 and 2008 and almost singlehandedly made CEO Angelo Mozilo the face of a rogue industry. Not coincidentally, on June 4 the Securities and Exchange Commission charged Mozilo with securities fraud, alleging that he misled investors about the increasing risks Countrywide was taking with loans that Mozilo privately called "toxic."

At this point, it is almost impossible for business reporters and editors not to have an opinion about Morgenson. Supporters cheer her tell-it-like-it-is style; detractors call her simplistic and agenda-driven. In certain Wall Street and business circles, she is flatly detested.

"She rules," says Aaron Elstein, a senior writer who covers Wall Street for *Crain's New York*. "She grasped that the game was rigged way before it was fashionable to do so." (He was talking about bogus accounting practices, but the remark holds more generally.)

"Unreadable," snaps a business journalism peer. "She writes like an Escalade running into a concrete barrier. And her relentless and repetitious pounding of simplistic issues is maddening."

"The consensus view of her among actual business people I know is pure contempt," says Jim McCarthy of CounterPoint Strategies, a public relations firm that has represented high-profile business-press targets. "Her work has a sort of drive-by, potshot quality to it that leads to habitual mistakes and ideological laziness. She is reflexively opposed to free markets and assumes bad faith in almost every subject or person she examines."

What both sides miss, and what sets Morgenson apart, is that she combines the blunt writing style with a prodigious fact-gathering ability and an accountability mindset all too rare in the business-press culture. This allows her to go beyond merely reporting and commenting on the public agenda. She helps to set it.

For the public, the financial crisis has demonstrated the degree to which Morgenson matters. We've just experienced a long period of radical deregulation that touched off a sea change in the business culture and at the same time created an information vacuum. How was the public to know about Wall Street–backed predatory lending and the scale it had reached? Most of the business press ducked the challenge, sticking largely to tried-and-true formulas: personality profiles, scoops handed out by insiders and after-the-fact explanations of the latest corporate scandal. And while the press did publish some investor- and consumer-oriented stories about the housing bubble, defective mortgage products and the like, it was culturally incapable of grasping the big picture—that, for instance, the financial sector had gone rogue.

Morgenson got it then and gets it now. Ignoring the eye rolls of her peers, pushing back against the lawyers and the flacks, she aims her reporting straight at the heart of the matter—and in doing so points the way for a more credible business press. Many groaned, for instance, at her repeated pounding in recent years on excesses in executive compensation. But we now know that compensation lies at the center of today's crisis, since everyone from mortgage brokers to Wall Street executives was given incentives to sell financial products without regard for their quality. Similarly, what Morgenson saw as a fairness problem became a systemic one, since income distortions left a borrower class too strapped to repay consumer loans. More broadly, her tone of urgency and accountability gave the public the message it needed to hear: something in the system had gone deeply awry.

Long before most in the business press rose to the challenge, Morgenson was reporting that the financial sector had gone rogue.

Morgenson made fairly strenuous efforts to talk me out of this profile, arguing variously that she wasn't the story, that others in the mortgage mess were far more significant, that attention might impair her effectiveness, etc. (As a thoughtful journalist, I of course blew all this off.) Waiting for her in a restaurant around the corner from her office at the *Times*, I'm more nervous than I expected to be. Not helping my sang-froid was the one-word description a friend at the *Times* offered of Morgenson's grimly focused demeanor in the newsroom: scary. She sweeps in—tall, blond hair well coiffed at shoulder length, blue eyes, carrying stuff, chattering apologies about being (two minutes) late—and I'm relieved and surprised to find how quickly it feels like I'm talking with an old friend. Over eggs and granola, she is chatty, even dishy and disarmingly open. At a certain point, though, I touch a nerve—something to do with her prerogatives at the *Times*, I think—and the chitchat ceases. Her eyes narrow and now seem icy as she stares across the table. I start to understand what it is like to face off against her.

But that's part of the formula. She has a lot of power for a business reporter, and she acts like it. When I ask, for instance, what she thinks of her former employer, *Forbes*—a question that would seem to call for some diplomacy—she says simply, "Awful. Terrible." Breaking a few more industry taboos, she then unfavorably compares current *Forbes* editor William Baldwin with his predecessor, the late Jim Michaels, one of her mentors.

"Jim Michaels had a knack for taking a small story and mak-

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ing it big," she says slyly. "Bill Baldwin has a knack for making a big story small."

(Baldwin, reached later, brushes off the slam. "*Forbes* has always been brusque in judgment and tough on people, and if you dish it out you have to learn to take it," he says.)

Still, plutocrats and liberals expecting or hoping to find a stern ideologue in Morgenson—or, really, sweeping views from her of any kind—will be disappointed. For one thing, many will be surprised to learn she's a moderate Republican. "I believe in capitalism," she says. "To me it's natural that I would go after the people who are wrecking it."

What becomes apparent over several conversations is that Morgenson is a business reporter—no more, no less. She's more likely to mention investors as her main concern than readers or "the public." Her views are pragmatic, sometimes small-bore to the point that her detail-laden writing can turn off casual readers. Her fixes are meliorative and not particularly original—better regulation, more competition. Her radical idea is, basically, that regulators should regulate, rating agencies should rate according to the merits of the credit, corporate compensation committees should set executive pay at arm's length, directors should look to the interests of shareholders first, large shareholders should act like the owners they are and mortgage lending should be something other than a game of three-card monte. That these views are seen as "antibusiness" in some circles tells us less about Morgenson than about the ethical breakdown among this generation's corporate elites.

That Morgenson's views are seen by some as as 'antibusiness' tells us less about her than about the ethics of today's corporate elites.

"If you're going to believe this is an ownership society where you're going to take part in the upside, if you're going to participate in a sort of populist form of capitalism…you have to be confident that the agents have your best interests at heart," she says.

Morgenson was born in State College, Pennsylvania, the daughter of liberal parents. Her father was an academic psychologist who later taught at Wilfrid Laurier University (in Waterloo, Ontario), and her mother was a librarian. Her parents split when she was 10, and she moved with her mom to Oxford, Ohio.

Her ambition as a girl was to be a reporter for the *New York Times*. After graduating from her parents' alma mater (St. Olaf College, in Northfield, Minnesota), lacking contacts, training or much in the way of money, she nonetheless boarded a plane for New York City and eventually landed a job in journalism—as a secretary at *Vogue* reporting to, of course, a tyrannical editor. ("It was 'devil wears Prada,' totally," she says.) She later moved up to a low-level editorial job ("assistant slave," as she puts it), then began to write personal-finance columns. But at a salary of $10,000 a year, she found she couldn't afford her new profession and left for a better-paying job on Wall Street.

Her three years at Dean Witter (now part of Morgan Stanley) taught her a few things about the financial-services industry, none of them particularly edifying. For example, if the office squawk box in the morning announced an "overnight special" on some stock laden with incentives for the brokers, "you knew it would open lower," she says. Another lesson: "You can't trust your research department; that you learn pretty quickly." Her career, such as it was, lasted until mid-1983, when an early version of the tech bubble burst, costing some of her clients a lot of money. "I felt so terrible," she says. "I had this terrible guilt."

Retreating to the relative moral high ground of journalism, she cadged a six-month trial at *Money* magazine and eventually a job at *Forbes*, then known for its hard-hitting business investigations. She rose quickly, learning at the feet of Michaels, the magazine's defining personality and editor from 1961 to 1999. A taskmaster (he could be "nasty, frightening," she recalls), Michaels stressed the importance of assembling an armada of facts in reporting and cutting to the chase in writing. Don't leave it to the reader to sort it out, he preached.

It was under Michaels that Morgenson became Morgenson, rattling off a series of investigative coups. A 1993 bombshell that found the entire Nasdaq trading system was tilted to favor stockbrokers over investors led to a historic $1 billion antitrust settlement with Wall Street firms. Another *Forbes* story took aim at the mid-1990s euphoria surrounding "boiler rooms"—registered and licensed small brokerages that were in fact criminal enterprises. The firms cold-called and bamboozled thousands of people into investing in plausible-sounding tiny public companies the brokerages secretly controlled. And while all business publications covered the resulting criminal cases, only Morgenson traced the frauds of one particularly malignant firm, A.R. Baron & Company, to its financial backer and back-office services provider: Bear Stearns.

The story detailed an intimate relationship between a criminal enterprise and a Wall Street bank, including unheeded letters from frantic investors pleading with Bear to cancel trades they had never authorized. The piece, incredibly, also traced the relationship between Baron principal Andrew Bressman and Richard Harriton, a top Bear official. Bear later agreed to pay $38 million (and got off incredibly easy) to settle charges brought by the SEC and the Manhattan district attorney, Robert Morgenthau. Harriton agreed to pay $1 million and was barred from the business.

The business press generally goes to great lengths to avoid this kind of straightforward investigative reporting, which is why Morgenson's approach has been so badly needed in recent years. After all, the mortgage crisis was nothing if not the Bear/Baron model writ large. It is generally conceded today that Ameriquest, Countrywide, Washington Mutual, Citigroup—all the brand names, in fact—were running boiler rooms underwritten and incentivized by Bear, Lehman, Merrill Lynch and the Wall Street securitization machine. The business press did not cover it then and still hasn't gotten its arms around this phenomenon. If readers are wondering why they were

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surprised by the mortgage crisis, this is the reason.

Morgenson arrived at the *Times* in 1998, an ascension that brought an investigative, accountability-oriented sensibility to a highly visible outpost. Reading through years of her work in one sitting isn't an entirely pleasurable experience—it can feel like you're being pummeled by a sock filled with wet sand. But even so, a reader is struck by her mastery of technical details, the force of her prose and, mostly, the underlying insistence that capitalism be made to work for everyone, not just the big shots. Her work in the run-up to the tech bubble was characteristically skeptical and investor oriented. Common causes of columns and stories include, besides compensation reform: shareholder rights; effective corporate governance; nonrigged arbitrations; anti-gouging; full disclosure in consumer lending; and fairness in bankruptcy, foreclosure and other legal proceedings. Her 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Beat Reporting was officially awarded for stories that plumbed bogus Wall Street stock research and the dangers of off-balance-sheet financing. But in an era of spectacular business corruption (Enron, WorldCom, etc.), I suspect the Pulitzer judges, who were not business news specialists, also appreciated her confrontational approach.

Not everyone does, of course. A handful of bloggers, including the late Doris Dungey (known as Tanta) of Calculated Risk and University of Illinois law professor Larry Ribstein, have created large bodies of work debunking and mocking her and picking her apart. Ribstein, who calls her Morgenscreed, particularly objects to the *Times* allowing her to write both an opinion column ("Fair Game") and straight news, sometimes on the same subjects. In a column last November, the *Times*'s public editor, Clark Hoyt, tut-tutted the paper for the practice (Andrew Ross Sorkin, among others, is also allowed the dual platform) but not very convincingly. The critiques, most centering on Morgenson's alleged oversimplications, come across as arguments about wallpaper design in a burning house. Bloggers, for instance, hit the roof over a Morgenson column last September arguing that the newly nationalized Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac should be made to disclose details about the individual mortgages they'd bought or guaranteed in the past decade. Ribstein found the idea an example of her "extreme idiocy." Others would wonder what's wrong with it.

Morgenson is collegial, but she doesn't hesitate to assert her prerogatives at the *Times*. Editors make suggestions; they don't give orders.

In the *Times*'s famously baroque culture, some people are known to have power, and others aren't. Morgenson has it. She's not known as a shmoozer but as one of the most efficient staffers at the paper: in at 9:30; out, incredibly, around 6. And while she's a cheerful and cooperative colleague by all accounts—helping out younger staffers, waiting her turn at the salad bar, etc.—she doesn't hesitate to assert her undefined but very real prerogatives. Editors ask her questions and make suggestions. They don't give orders.

The downside, according to a midlevel editor, is that Morgenson is not particularly open to nuance or different points of view. This person says the system can lead to a kind of orthodoxy and groupthink that deadens reporting. Morgenson's views on executive compensation, for instance, are hardly out of step with the "way people think" around the *Times*, the person notes.

That said, her clout has its limits. In 2003 the *Times* business section was getting an overhaul. Its editor, Glenn Kramon, was moving up and out. Jockeying began for a successor, with internal candidates including Jim Schachter, now editor of digital initiatives at the paper, and Winnie O'Kelley, a business editor with whom Morgenson has been particularly close.

Instead, executive editor Bill Keller chose Lawrence Ingrassia, who had run the *Wall Street Journal*'s "Money & Investing" section. While many believed Ingrassia had breathed life into a stale operation, some at the *Times* viewed him (unfairly, in my view) as a cheerleader for the tech bubble, mainly because of his frequent appearances on CNBC during the late '90s. Some also believed he didn't "get" the investigative, accountability-oriented journalism Morgenson practices, favoring instead the kind that depends on access to power.

When Keller asked Morgenson about hiring Ingrassia, according to people with knowledge of the conversation, she told him flatly that it was a bad idea. But she also promised to make it work. (Keller, through a *Times* spokeswoman, declined to comment.) For his part, Ingrassia, now 57, has nothing but praise for Morgenson. "She knows Wall Street and how it works better than any reporter I've seen," he says. "She has great sources, and she's passionate. She cares deeply about making sure that individual investors are treated fairly. Basically, she believes people in positions of responsibility should act responsibly." Ingrassia said he and Morgenson have "quite a good working relationship, now."

Says Morgenson, turning cautious and speaking slowly: "Larry Ingrassia has been extremely supportive of my work this year."

However one parses all that, few would argue that the business section has not dramatically improved in recent years. Despite a relatively small staff (the *Times* has about 110 business journalists; the *Journal*, about 700), it is reasonably competitive on major stories and has assembled a cadre of reporters capable of strong investigative work, including Diana Henriques, Charles Duhigg, Vikas Bajaj, Louis Uchitelle, Stephen Labaton, Louise Story and Peter Goodman, supplemented by Jo Becker of the investigative staff.

Morgenson, Ingrassia and the *Times* business staff have produced some of the best coverage of the crisis, particularly the "Reckoning" series at the end of last year, which included exposés on major themes: the predatory practices at Countrywide, Washington Mutual and other brand names; compromised regulation; skewed compensation incentives; even the role played by the person in charge of the regulatory system, George W. Bush. The paper's news coverage has been complemented by strong editorials, many written by Teresa Tritch, a former staffer at *Money*.

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Morgenson's approach has obviously been vindicated by the crisis, and she continues to help steer the public agenda. A story in April (with Becker as the lead byline) deftly revealed Timothy Geithner's longstanding social and professional ties to some of the leading culprits in the financial mess, including Robert Rubin (a longtime mentor), Sanford Weill (who, the story revealed, pushed Geithner to head Citigroup) and executives at money manager BlackRock (which got a no-bid bailout contract from Geithner's New York Fed). A June 1 story peeled back Wall Street lobbying efforts to dilute the regulation of derivatives, and unearthed a key lobbyist's memo that has helped shape the Obama administration's policy-making.

Like newspaper crusaders of old, Morgenson has sided with the little guy over the big guy, revealing, for instance, that Countrywide's predations continued even after its borrowers had filed for bankruptcy. A series in 2007 and last year reported that the lender had destroyed or "lost" $500,000 in homeowners' mortgage payments, then imposed additional penalties and fees, and presented to the court "re-created" letters that had never been mailed to homeowners.

"It's really about fairness," Morgenson says. "It just seems that the playing field is so skewed in some cases that it's worthwhile to educate people to level the playing field a little bit."

A little-understood aspect of Morgenson's approach is that she avoids a business-press tendency toward oversophistication and goes after the big, honking story, the kind that rings alarm bells in executive suites.

Take the AIG/Goldman story. It came a mere two weeks after the bailout was announced, with the public still baffled as to why an insurance company would suddenly require scores of billions from the government. It also involved clashing with Wall Street's most powerful firm on the crux of a vital matter of public policy. (Disclosure: Goldman is a funder of *Columbia Journalism Review*'s business section, "The Audit," which I run.)

Today, Lucas van Praag, a Goldman spokesman, says the story was "really very unfair" and that the now-corrected error, which mistakenly placed Blankfein in the same meeting with his predecessor, then–Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, set off damaging conspiracy theories. (Tim O'Brien, one of Morgenson's editors, who got the original tip for the story, takes the blame for the error.)

Goldman, which adamantly contested Morgenson's premise that it had been exposed to AIG's failure, received support from a surprising quarter: Geithner, who called Morgenson on her cellphone the day the story ran, a Sunday.

"I think they were fully hedged," he told her, according to people familiar with the call. Translation: Goldman had no exposure because it had bought insurance from third parties.

"Do you know who the counterparties were?" she snapped back. Translation: are you sure, and have you checked? He conceded he hadn't, the people said. Geithner made a similar call to Ingrassia, people familiar with that call said. (A spokesman for Geithner declined to comment.)

The dispute continues. Goldman officials have repeated that

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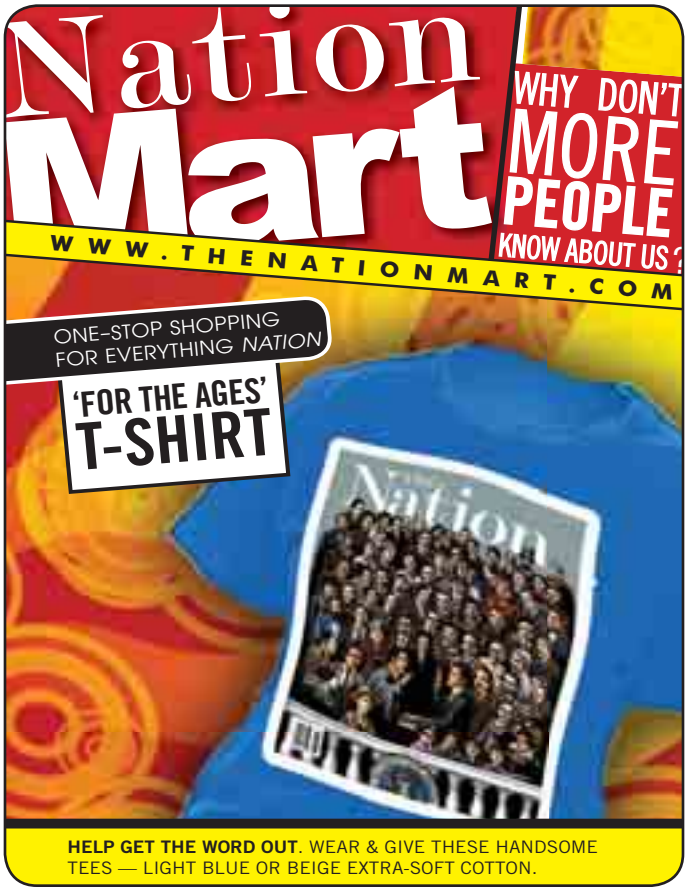
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Goldman's exposure to AIG was "not material," in effect disputing Morgenson's premise. The meeting between Blankfein and Morgenson in April did not resolve the question.

But even conceding Goldman's main point—that $10 billion was covered at the time of the bailout—the bank still had another $10 billion exposed, the value of which easily could have, and probably would have, plummeted absent a bailout. One could argue that with Goldman's immediate exposure covered, the AIG bailout didn't benefit Goldman directly and that Goldman benefited no more than other banks. But the AIG bailout clearly mattered to Goldman—and would come to matter more as additional bailout funds flowed to the bank, totaling $12.9 billion. The *Times* stands by the story, and the story stands.

In one of our later interviews, Morgenson remarks that such chronicling has shaken her belief in capitalism "to the core." But one comes away unconvinced. She was a skeptic in the first place, after all, and doesn't put much faith in government either. "It's scarier than what Wall Street was doing," she says. "The secrecy, doing an end run around Congress, tripling the size of the Fed's balance sheet."

So capitalism is the world's worst system except for all the others? "You need it," she says firmly. "But it must have a counterbalance, and that counterbalance must be tough regulation—and a very forthright media." ■

The War Against the 'War on Drugs'

Economic necessity and shifting mores are changing the nation's approach to incarceration.

by SASHA ABRAMSKY

As California goes, so goes the nation.

If that old adage still holds true, then the nation may soon see a gradual backpedaling from the criminal justice policies that have led to wholesale incarceration in recent decades. For the most populous state in the union is on the verge of insolvency—partly because it didn't set aside a rainy-day fund during the boom years; partly because its voters recently rejected a series of initiatives that would have allowed a combination of tax increases, spending cuts and borrowing to help stabilize the state's finances during the downturn; partly because it has spent the past quarter-century funneling tens of billions of dollars into an out-of-control correctional system. Now, as California's politicians contemplate emergency cuts to deal with a $24 billion hole in the state budget, old certainties are crumbling.

The state with the toughest three-strikes law in the land and a prison population of more than 150,000 is facing the real possibility of having to release tens of thousands of inmates early in order to pare its $10 billion annual correctional budget. At the same time, an increasing number of the state's political figures are challenging the basic tenets of the "war on drugs," the culprit most responsible for the spike in prison populations over the past thirty years; they argue that the country's harsh drug policies are not financially viable and no longer command majority support among the voting public.

Similar stories are unfolding around the country; in Washington, federal officials are talking about drug-policy reform and, more generally, sentencing reform in a way that has not been heard in the halls of power for more than a generation.

For old-time politicians, who have spent the past three-plus decades navigating the country's roiling tough-on-crime waters, the changes are almost unfathomable. Onetime California governor and current gubernatorial hopeful Jerry Brown, for example, has spent decades trying to erase the public's memory of his liberal tenure in the 1970s, when California's prison population shrank to well below 30,000. As a part of that remodeling, he has assiduously courted the California Correctional Peace Officers' Association, the trade union representing the state's prison guards. Now, with his war chest flush with CCPOA funds, Brown won't do anything to challenge tough-on-crime orthodoxies.

TIM ROBINSON

Yet many newer political faces view the current moment as something of an opportunity. For Betty Yee, chair of California's Board of Equalization—the office responsible for collecting sales tax in the Golden State—the changes, especially around drug-law enforcement, can't come soon enough.

Sasha Abramsky, a freelance journalist and senior fellow at Demos, is the author, most recently, of Breadline USA: The Hidden Scandal of American Hunger and How to Fix It *(PoliPoint).*

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Sitting at her conference table high up in one of downtown Sacramento's few sky-rises, Yee has marijuana on her mind. Specifically, she has become an outspoken advocate for legalizing pot for residents older than 21. Her friend Assemblyman Tom Ammiano, a former San Francisco city councilman, is pushing just such a bill in the State Legislature. Yee wants to levy fees on business owners applying for marijuana licenses, impose an excise tax on sellers and charge buyers a sales tax. Do it properly, and the state could reap about $1.3 billion a year, she has estimated. "Marijuana is so easily available. Why not regulate it like alcohol and tobacco?" she says, and gain additional tax revenue into the bargain?

Not so many years back, any public figure who dared to advocate such reforms would have been shunned by much of the establishment. It's a measure of how much things have changed that Yee and Ammiano's proposal is being taken seriously across the board. In fact, shortly after I met with Yee, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger—whose office declined my request for an interview for this article—announced that the state should at least consider the merits of pot legalization. He wasn't advocating it, he was careful to stress, but he did think the time was ripe to debate the issue.

"The budget is so bad now, the populism of the issue is beginning to work here in the Legislature," Ammiano says as he paces back and forth in his office, toward the bookshelves with the four martini glasses and Golden Gate Bridge bookends and then away again. On the wall near the receptionist's desk hangs a huge poster from the movie *Milk*. "Everyone thinks it's Cheech and Chong," he says with a laugh, describing the marijuana legalization bill. "But there's a lot of policy wonks" supporting it. "There's very conservative support from the oddest sources and locations." The GOP chair in the state, as well as Tom Campbell, a Republican gubernatorial hopeful, have indicated their support for his bill, Ammiano declares. "When it starts to cost more money than it's worth even in the eyes of the poohbahs, then you can accomplish something."

The country's harsh drug policies are not financially viable and no longer command majority support among the voting public.

Over the past three decades, California has tripled the number of prisons it operates, has more than quintupled its prison population and has gone from spending $5 on higher education for every dollar it spent on corrections to a virtual dead-heat in spending. That puts it in the same boat as Michigan, Vermont, Oregon, Connecticut and Delaware—all of which, according to estimates by the Pew Charitable Trust, spend as much or more on prisons than on colleges. California is also under federal court order to implement costly improvements in the delivery of medical and mental healthcare services in prisons and to release close to a third of the prison population—about 55,000 inmates—to improve conditions for those remaining behind bars.

Schwarzenegger adamantly opposed that ruling by a three-judge panel. Now, though, in the face of fiscal calamity, he is proposing cutting the prison population by tens of thousands. Of course, he is doing that not out of concern for inmates' well-being, or out of a sense that many sentences are disproportionate to the crime, but simply because the state can no longer pay its bills. Schwarzenegger believes he can save several hundred million dollars by releasing some categories of inmates, in particular nonviolent offenders who are in the country illegally and stand to be deported upon early release.

To save money, he's also talking about firing hard-working guards (a far better, but costlier, option would be to scale back the prison system and to retrain surplus guards to work in other venues), and he's asking for close to $1 billion in cuts to vital prison drug-treatment, education and job-training services. At the same time, since this is all about shaving dollars off budgets rather than intelligent criminal justice system reform, there's no talk of investing in crucial re-entry infrastructure.

In short, it looks like California will go about a necessary scaling back of the correctional system exactly the wrong way. But however grudgingly state officials are approaching the issue, at least they recognize that the magnitude of prison spending is a problem. Down the road, when Californians start thinking beyond the crisis moment, that new understanding will shape policy responses for years to come. It will both feed off and help create a new national sentiment that being "tough on crime" isn't necessarily being smart on crime.

Tough-on-crime rhetoric, and the policies and institutions that grow from it, emerged from Nixon's Silent Majority tactics, from his recasting of politics as a series of debates around "values" rather than bread-and-butter issues. And in the same way the 2008 presidential election ended that peculiar chapter in American history, so too did it end the monotone cry that we could incarcerate our way out of deep-rooted social and economic problems. Despite a few halfhearted GOP attempts to accuse Democrats of being weak on drugs and public safety—Obama had, after all, written about his drug use during his teenage and early adult years, which, according to the old calculus, should have made him an easy target for scaremongers—neither presidential candidate played the tough-on-crime card. It was a nonissue for most voters and thus for the candidates. In fact, recent Zogby polling commissioned by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency suggests that close to eight in ten Americans favor alternatives to incarceration for low-level nonviolent offenders. Another Zogby poll, from last fall, found that just more than three-quarters of Americans felt the "war on drugs" was a failure. The sea change in public opinion holds in California too. In late March the *Los Angeles Times* ran a column asking readers their opinion on marijuana legalization. So far 4,927 people have replied, and 94 percent of them favor legalization. A Field Poll in April found that 56 percent of Californians favor legalizing and taxing pot.

The new atmosphere is most apparent vis-à-vis the Obama administration's move away from "war on drugs" rhetoric and

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toward a harm-reduction strategy. Gil Kerlikowske, the new head of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, has made it clear that he prefers treatment over punishment for drug users, a preference he brings from his time as a reform-oriented police chief in Seattle. Putting money where its mouth is, the new team has increased funding for the Bush-era Second Chance Act, intended to connect released inmates with community services such as housing, family counseling and addiction treatment. Support is also growing for the creation of more drug and mental health courts across the country. Finally, there are the promises being made by drug policy leaders in Washington that state medical marijuana laws will be respected rather than trampled, as they have been for more than a decade.

A related issue involves the infamous discrepancy in sentences for crack- versus powder-cocaine crimes. Vice President Biden was one of the architects of these laws—which is why his repudiation of them in recent years has been so significant. The day after Obama's inauguration, the president's website mentioned the importance of eliminating these discrepancies—as well as of promoting needle-exchange programs and expanding the nation's embryonic network of drug courts. The House recently held hearings on the sentencing discrepancy issue.

For Margaret Dooley-Sammuli, deputy state director of the Drug Policy Alliance in Southern California, sacrosanct legislative underpinnings of the "war on drugs" are starting to look like the Berlin Wall, "up one day and down the next"—seemingly impregnable; in reality, utterly fragile. Over the past few years, an increasing number of localities have dabbled in ways to simply walk away from the "war on drugs." Initiatives in several states and cities, including Denver; Missoula, Montana; Albany County, Oregon; and Seattle have mandated that law enforcement agencies deprioritize marijuana arrests. Several cities have begun needle-exchange programs. And states like California have passed citizens' initiatives mandating that first-time drug offenders be channeled into treatment programs in lieu of prisons.

Then there's Virginia Senator Jim Webb's legislation creating a blue-ribbon commission on criminal justice reform, with a mandate to put all questions on the table during its eighteen-month tenure—from drug law reform to the restoration of judicial discretion in sentencing, from parole reforms to different approaches to gangs, border patrol, prison architecture and the like. Webb has been pushing for systemic criminal justice reform for years; in 2009, he believes, it will acquire legs. During a telephone interview for this article, Webb said that President Obama "has personally called me on this, and he's very supportive of the idea of moving forward." Across the aisle many Republican senators, including senior figures like Lindsey Graham, have also expressed support for the idea.

The bipartisan backing for Webb's commission is partly a response to the escalating drug-and-gang crisis south of the border. There's a growing recognition in US policy and law enforcement circles that government dysfunction, phenomenal levels of street violence and the rising power of drug cartels are threatening to move from being a Latin American problem to one that destroys the integrity of the Mexican state and risks spilling over more heavily into the American Southwest. Nobody, no matter their political stripe, wants the Tijuana-ization or Juárez-ization of Phoenix or Los Angeles, of San Diego or El Paso.

"It really is a serious problem in this country," Webb argues. "The transnational gangs or syndicates are bringing a tremendous amount of drugs into this country."

To get a handle on that problem involves thinking of ways to neutralize these gangs, which inevitably leads to a discussion of partial drug decriminalization or legalization. Why? Because once the drug market is no longer confined to the shadows—once it is regulated and taxed, as alcohol was after Prohibition ended in 1933—the violence that accompanies struggles for control of that illicit market will disappear. After years of denying this truth and assuming that the country could incarcerate its way out of the drug-abuse epidemic, a number of American politicians, Webb included, are touting that seemingly paradoxical fact. Want to get really tough on crime? Well, do the smart thing: start working out ways to neutralize the drug cartels, start talking about at least limited forms of decriminalization or legalization.

The Obama administration is moving away from a 'tough on crime' strategy and toward one that favors treatment over punishment.

It is, Webb argues, "a fair issue for this commission. Every piece of it should be fair game."

For an administration like Obama's that prides itself on thinking outside the box, systemic drug policy reform is an intriguing prospect. An increasing number of law enforcement people and judges have also decided that this is an idea worth running with.

"I've never seen so much interest," says retired Orange County superior court judge James Gray, who has been advocating marijuana legalization since the early 1990s. "My phone is ringing much more than it ever has before."

"We need to ask, Is there a more sensible approach?" argues Norm Stamper, who, like Kerlikowske, is a former chief of police of Seattle who believes the criminal justice system is broken. "And the answer is prevention and education and treatment."

After decades of being on the defensive, progressive criminal justice reformers suddenly have a receptive audience. New York, which has closed some of its prisons in the past decade, has spent the last few years unraveling the tangled web created by the 1970s-era Rockefeller drug laws. Michigan, Louisiana and several other states have also scaled back their harshest mandatory drug sentences. The State of Washington is looking at how to redefine low-end drug and property crimes as misdemeanors rather than felonies. And in Michigan, which allows a $100 theft to trigger a four-year prison sentence, legislators are pushing

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to make the threshold $1,000 instead, so as to reduce the number of low-end offenders pushed into long-term incarceration and hobbled for life by felony convictions.

Meanwhile, correctional system administrators in Georgia, Illinois and Arkansas have started the long, hard task of reforming their systems from within even without a new consensus emerging on the issue.

Howard Wooldridge, a retired police detective from Bath, Michigan, who advocates in DC for criminal justice system reform, says the moment is ripe for change. "I've been doing this for twelve years, and this is by far the most perfect storm."

America isn't about to abandon all of its "tough on crime" tenets. Nor should it in all instances. The three-strikes law will likely remain in place for violent offenders, as will the growing body of laws limiting where sex offenders may live. Violent crimes will probably continue to trigger longer sentences than they did before the get-tough movement. And while some inmates will qualify for early release, many sentenced to long terms at the height of the tough-on-crime years will stay in prison. But out of economic necessity and because of shifting mores, the country will likely get more selective, and smarter, about how it uses incarceration and whom it targets for long spells behind bars.

This will be especially true for drug policy—the multitentacled beast that's sucking most people into jails and prisons. There, profound changes are likely to develop over the next few years. And when it comes to the mentally ill, momentum continues to build around mental health courts designed to get people medical and counseling help rather than simply to shunt them off to prison. States like Pennsylvania are starting to develop parallel institutions to deal with mentally ill people who run afoul of the law. Many other states will likely follow suit in the near future. Forty years after deinstitutionalization, a new consensus is emerging that prisons became an accidental, de facto alternative to mental hospitals, and that very little good has come from that development.

"I believe that we have a compelling national interest," explains Senator Webb, referring to systemic criminal justice reform. "That's a term that is carefully chosen. This is a national commission, but it should not be limited to looking at the federal prison system. You have to look at the whole picture and then boil it down into resolvable issues." ■

The Virginity Movement, Rebranded

It might sound milder, and appear hipper, but it traffics in the same old sexism.

by JESSICA VALENTI

Keith Deltano has a high school student tied up onstage and is precariously dangling a cinder block over the young man's genital region. Deltano is not a school bully or an escaped lunatic. He's an abstinence proponent, a comedian who uses this brick trick to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of condoms (although the actual lesson learned may be to steer clear of comics brandishing bricks).

TIM ROBINSON

Under the Bush administration, stories like this were commonplace. There was the Virginia Beach teacher who told her ninth graders they could be arrested for having premarital sex. And the abstinence teacher who explained to the young women in his class that women are like wrapped lollipops, and that after having sex they're nothing more than "poorly wrapped, saliva-fouled suckers."

This would be comical if not for the fact that these people have been teaching—or *not* teaching, more accurately—young Americans about sex. And then there are the assorted ridiculous sex-scare policy decisions—like the FDA holding up over-the-counter status for emergency contraception out of fear that it would make young women promiscuous or even lead to teens forming "sex-based cults."

Thankfully, the Obama administration has brought some measure of sanity to public health policy, cutting most abstinence-only education funding from the 2010 budget. But abstinence organizations are not going away. In fact, they're getting organized. Well aware that their cause is in trouble and unpopular, purity proponents are revamping their image to appear more mainstream. And with Obama's faith-based initiative lending them an ear, it just might work.

In my book *The Purity Myth*, I call these folks the virginity movement. Composed of antifeminist think tanks like the Independent Women's Forum and Concerned Women for America, abstinence-only organizations, religious leaders and legislators with regressive social values, the virginity movement is much more than the same old sexism; it's a targeted and well-funded backlash hellbent on rolling back women's rights using modernized notions of purity, morality and sexuality. Its goals are mired in old-school gender roles, and its primary tool is young women's sexuality. (What better way to get people to pay attention to your cause than to frame it in terms of teenage girls' having, or not having, sex? It's salacious!)

The virginity movement has suffered a number of public

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embarrassments recently, from the Bristol Palin pregnancy brouhaha to study after study demonstrating the ineffectiveness of virginity pledges and abstinence-only education programs.

Its spokespeople aren't exactly helping, either. Leslee Unruh, founder and president of the Abstinence Clearinghouse, has a reputation for being a bit unhinged. In a 2007 Fox News segment, for example, Unruh debated Mary Alice Carr of NARAL Pro-Choice New York over a new oral contraceptive. After arguing that the birth control pill was poison and that women needed to be protected from it, Unruh ended the segment by becoming frenetic and screaming over Carr, "I want more babies. More babies! We love babies!"

Unruh loves babies so much, in fact, that she founded an organization called the Alpha Center, which in 1987 pleaded no contest to five misdemeanor charges of unlicensed adoption and foster care practices. (Nineteen additional charges, including four felonies, were dropped.)

Valerie Huber, executive director of the National Abstinence Education Association (NAEA) and former head of Ohio's abstinence programs, also brought the movement unfavorable coverage when she was suspended after a state ethics investigation found her guilty of neglect of duty for hiring a company she was affiliated with to do state work.

The lack of consistent and presentable leadership, combined with ripe-for-mockery educators like Deltano, has made it all too easy to dismiss the virginity movement's message. And they know it. One of the "Strategic Objectives" now listed on the NAEA website is "Rebranding the abstinence message."

So when the NAEA met for its annual lobby day in March, high on the list of priorities was developing a strategy for continuing to receive federal dollars. Joe Sonka, managing editor of the Advocates for Youth blog Amplify, wrote of the lobby day, "Instead of abandoning their demonization of condoms and adherence to social conservative ideology over sound science, they would simply rebrand themselves as a curriculum that 'wasn't just about abstinence,' but was all about 'holistic approaches' to 'healthy lifestyle choices.'"

At an April 29 Capitol Hill briefing, Huber told the room that abstinence-only education is "not a 'just say no' message." "This is not abstinence only, this is a holistic message that prepares and gives students all of the information they need to make healthy decisions," Huber said. In fact, the NAEA isn't even calling its programs "abstinence only" anymore—now they're "abstinence centered."

Similarly, WhyKnow—a major provider of abstinence-only education curriculums—recently changed its name to On Point, its tag line to "Direction for Life" and hired PR company Maycreate Idea Group to help recast its image. Lesley Scearce, executive director of On Point, said in an article for the *Chattanoogan* that the organization is trying to "get teens involved in new, positive directions that lead to a healthier, more fulfilling life. Without a re-naming, re-branding and re-positioning, this new direction wouldn't have been possible."

Perhaps the virginity movement recognized that threatening students with bricks and telling them they're dirty pieces of candy wasn't working, so this rebranding effort includes appropriating the language and tools of comprehensive sex education and its advocates. At Huber's DC briefing, for example, she assured her audience that "abstinence education talks about STDs and the medically accurate information regarding that" and that "abstinence education talks about contraception." But of course, the only time abstinence-only classes will talk about contraception is when they discuss failure rates—often exaggerating those rates or spreading misinformation about the dangers of contraception. In the past, this tactic has been taken to extremes. In Montana's Bozeman High School, for example, teens in 2005 were taught that condoms cause cancer.

The virginity movement is also attempting to legitimize its message by rebranding itself as science-based. The newly renamed Medical Institute (formerly known as the Medical Institute of Sexual Health), for example, touts itself as being founded to "confront the global epidemics of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.... We identify and evaluate scientific information on sexual health and promote healthy sexual decisions and behaviors by communicating credible scientific information."

> Perhaps the virginity movement figured out that threatening students with bricks and telling them they're dirty pieces of candy wasn't working.

Sounds innocuous, but the Medical Institute is a hard-core abstinence-only organization. Its advisory board reads like a Who's Who of purity pushers. Even W. David Hager—a former Bush appointee to the FDA's advisory board on reproductive health, who suggested prayer as a cure for PMS and whose ex-wife alleged in *The Nation* that he had repeatedly raped her ["Dr. Hager's Family Values," May 30, 2005]—is listed.

The NAEA is also jumping on the science bandwagon; on its AbstinenceWorks website, much of the home page is taken up by a graph showing the decrease in teen pregnancy rates, presumably to demonstrate its programs' effectiveness. The problem? The graph conveniently stops in 2006; the teen pregnancy rate in the United States has actually increased for the second year in a row.

The most public component in this rebranding effort, however, is the attempt to save face amid Bristol Palin's pregnancy by making her the new poster girl for abstinence. Despite the teen's earlier comments that abstinence was "unrealistic," Palin is being trotted out as the face of teen pregnancy prevention. She's even on the June 1 cover of *People* magazine, sporting a cap and gown and holding her son, Tripp.

In the article inside Palin says, "Girls need to imagine and picture their life with a screaming newborn baby and then think

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before they have sex.… If girls realized the consequences of sex, nobody would be having sex." Unless, of course, they were told how to protect themselves by using birth control.

The good news in all of this is President Obama's budget cutting most abstinence-only education funding and seeking to redirect the funds to "teen pregnancy prevention programs." The bad news is that 25 percent of the $164 million marked for teen pregnancy prevention would be open to abstinence-only programs, and the language in the budget doesn't make room for initiatives to curb sexually transmitted infections.

Joseph DiNorcia Jr., president of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, says, "This myopic approach does not represent the current state of the research or the desire of the American people for the federal government to invest in comprehensive sex education."

President Obama's Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, at the Department of Health and Human Services, has already come under fire from political bloggers like Pam Spaulding for "rolling out the welcome mat" for virginity movement leaders like the Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America to discuss reducing the abortion rate.

In addition to including organizations like these in discussions on abortion and sex education, President Obama in early June appointed Alexia Kelley, an antichoicer and executive director of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, to head the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

James Wagoner, president of Advocates for Youth, says that while there are reasons to be optimistic, "there are also reasons to be vigilant.… It would be a mistake to assume that the election of Obama and a Democratic Congress means failed abstinence-only programs will be eliminated." Wagoner says that now is not the time to "sit back and put our feet up," and he notes that programs stemming from the virginity movement are not just about public health but about "very negative gender stereotypes, promoting homophobia and undermining rights to information and education."

So while the virginity movement re-evaluates its image and messaging, progressives have to be just as prepared to battle back with renewed energy, with an eye toward legislative and policy gains and toward assuring that these groups don't regain their cultural footing. As Wagoner points out, this is about a lot a more than bad-faith messages about condoms and pregnancy. It's about stopping a movement committed to the regression of women's rights, enforcing gender norms and teaching America's youth—especially young women—that sexuality is wrong, dirty and dangerous.

Now that there's a new administration in Washington, we need to ensure not only that we hold our leaders accountable but that we direct the national conversation about sex, gender and health. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

care Task Force). Not present among the 100 were any leaders of the auto industry.

Walter and his top VP, Leonard Woodcock, spent hours with General Motors officials, extolling the economic and social values of national health versus the burdensome Blue Cross and Major Medical premiums, which even then had become a competitive and wage drag on GM, its employees and retirees. Walter emerged from the meeting and said to me, "There's something more important to them than their own self-interest." He had made an offer that union leaders of lesser stature would not have dared to make: under a comprehensive national health plan he would ask no more in collective bargaining than the benefits provided under that plan. His urging that they join in working to enact such a plan was flatly rejected. If it had been accepted, GM—certainly followed by Ford and Chrysler, and by most US manufacturers—could have produced enactment of a national health plan, probably during the Nixon administration.

After denouncing the Reuther effort early in 1969, Nixon—persuaded by favorable media reports about Reuther's plan—recanted that July, saw "a massive healthcare crisis" and vowed to act. Six months later Walter died in a plane crash. In 1973 Nixon, buffeted by Watergate, offered a health plan based on employer mandates.

Max Fine

Dirty Harry Comes Clean

Vista, Calif.

Akiva Gottlieb seems to argue in "Last Man Standing" [June 1] that Clint Eastwood is Dirty Harry and Dirty Harry is Clint Eastwood. Both are right-wing martyrs until death do them part. I'm no Eastwood groupie, but I disagree wholeheartedly with this hypothesis, especially Gottlieb's statement about Eastwood's latest film. "*Gran Torino*," he writes, "never entertains the idea that America is a country defined by its immigrants and not by John Wayne." Baloney. True, Walt Kowalski (Eastwood) is a typical white retiree, suspicious and disdainful of his new Hmong neighbors. But through a series of conflicts he comes to realize that these Asian immigrants embody the values of hard work, sacrifice, community and family that his own children and grandchildren have abandoned. At one point he looks in a mirror and says, "I have more in common with these Chinks than with my own family."

If this is Dirty Harry, then it is Dirty Harry matured, seasoned and redeemed. This is why my wife makes the film required viewing for college students in her intercultural communication class. And this is why I consider it one of Eastwood's best performances, Oscar or no Oscar.

Mark R. Day

New Haven, Conn.

Slavoj Zizek once said that the true measure of a nonracist encounter is to be able to insult one another and know the sentiment is not serious; PC aloofness hides its own bigotry. The humorless Akiva Gottlieb takes deep offense at Eastwood's latest film on this elitist ground, reviving the 1970s labeling of Clint as a fascist. In praising *The Wrestler*'s cynicism over *Gran Torino*'s sincere effort at multiculturalism, Gottlieb reinforces the same holier-than-thou attitude that has censored discussion on race since the Reagan era. Eastwood's values are conservative, but he doesn't deserve to be treated like a fundamentalist.

Grant Wiedenfeld

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Books & the Arts.

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Israeli troops depart from the last of their outposts in the Sinai on March 8, 1957.

A World Apart?

by BERNARD AVISHAI

A writer can't tackle a subject as immense as the United States and the Middle East without a kind of working conundrum. Patrick Tyler, a former *New York Times* and *Washington Post* correspondent, does not tell us what prompted him to write *A World of Trouble*, other than the declassification of some documents; but his conundrum is fairly easy to infer from the book's first chapter, which chronicles President Eisenhower's strong response to Israel during the aftermath of the 1956 Sinai War. Roughly, it is this:

The United States had reasons for becoming Israel's patron after the Six-Day War in 1967, but the continuing conflict has seriously damaged America's relations in the Middle East and across the Muslim world. And there is plenty of evidence—ever since Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser accepted UN Resolution 242 in July 1970—that at least Egypt and Jordan were prepared for a peace deal if the United States could have forced Israel back into its pre-1967 boundaries (allaying Israeli security fears with, say, a defense pact). During all this time, Israel has been almost entirely dependent on the United States for diplomatic cover, guns and money. During most of this time, US policy has been that Israel's colonization of the West Bank is "an obstacle to peace." Yet successive presidents allowed Israel a free hand while successive prime ministers expanded settlements to more than half a million people, a great many of them neo-Zionist fanatics—people who are inarguably an (arguably *the*) obstacle to peace. Why did these American presidents not dictate peace terms to Israel—by 1974 a client state—the way Eisenhower did in 1957? Was this incapacity or reluctance really, as some have famously charged, the work of the Israel lobby?

The good news you derive from Tyler's book—if good is the word for it—is that you cannot explain US foreign policy as the product of any permanent force, or quirk, of domestic politics. There are complex stories behind presidential responses. Yes, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has been influential; but you also need to consider factors like presidential ideology, real international rivals, varying levels of political vulnerability, narcissism and sheer stupidity. Tyler's book exposes so many presidents, in so many diplomatic fixes, that we derive something like a comparative taxonomy just from reading through it. And when you project Barack Obama into the

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A World of Trouble
The White House and the Middle East—From the Cold War to the War on Terror.
By Patrick Tyler.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 628 pp. $30.

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obvious categories—worldly versus naïve, vulnerable versus popular, and so forth—it seems clear that no president since Eisenhower is better positioned to bring Israel into line with an American version of, and interest in, regional peace. Obama has now delivered his Cairo speech. Will he—can he—follow through?

By the end of 1956, Tyler reminds us, Israel occupied most of the Sinai Peninsula, after attacking Nasser's forces in late October. The Israeli government was made up of virtually the same people who would be in power during the Six-Day War; their justifications for making the occupation of the Sinai permanent were ones that would become familiar after 1967: control of Palestinian terrorism, strategic depth through territorial expansion, "deterrence." The black joke at the time was that Hitler had swum to Egypt and become *nasser* ("wet" in Yiddish). Actually, though the Egyptian president spoke of rallying the "Arab nation" against colonialism, he shifted away from American patronage only after Eisenhower's powerful secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, failed to deliver on a promise to build a high dam at Aswan. Nasser then acquired an enormous quantity of tanks and MIGs from the Soviets. He also nationalized the Suez Canal.

Obama is in a better poisition to bring peace than any president since Eisenhower.

Israeli Prime Minster David Ben-Gurion, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden and France's Guy Mollet had plotted the whole "crisis" in advance. Israel would say that its invasion was to pre-empt insurgents operating from the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip, where about 1 million Palestinian refugees languished in camps. But this would serve as a pretext for England and France to intervene and reoccupy the canal zone. Ben-Gurion had brushed aside his foreign minister Moshe Sharett's secret contacts with Nasser and wanted urgently to pre-empt Egypt's assimilation of Soviet arms. He also wanted to open the port of Eilat, blockaded by Egypt at Sharm el-Sheikh since the 1949 cease-fire, and turn his newly minted Israel Defense Forces into a shaper of both diplomatic facts and the immigrant Hebrew nation. He was already developing a nuclear bomb.

And Ben-Gurion was not without a grand design that might well have appealed to cold warriors like Dulles. He had presented to his co-conspirators a plan that entailed Israel's annexing not only a large swath of the Sinai but also the West Bank of the young King Hussein's Kingdom of Jordan and southern Lebanon up to the Litani—while France installed a sympathetic regime in Damascus. Meanwhile, Britain's client, the Hashemite regime in Baghdad, would annex what was left of cousin Hussein's East Bank. Eden and Mollet, to their credit, refused to play Sykes and Picot to Ben-Gurion's Jabotinsky. But British and American intelligence agents (the head of the CIA was Dulles's brother Allen) were indeed plotting a coup in Syria. The Dulles brothers had, after all, already engineered the toppling of Mohammed Mosaddeq in Iran in 1953, reinstalling the shah.

Nevertheless, Eisenhower and his secretary of state were furious—and not only because the plot was hatched without telling them. For America had other interests, too—most obviously, in Persian Gulf oil fields and desert kingdoms. Eisenhower and Dulles were founders of the United Nations and wished to establish a stable order in the Middle East where international corporations could operate and that was not a necessary theater of cold war confrontation, as Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia had become. Besides, how could Dulles discredit the Soviet Union for its suppression of the Hungarian revolution while two of NATO's leading members crushed Nasser and re-entered the Canal Zone? How could America sponsor the Saudi regime when the region, inflamed by Israel's triumphs and imperial associations, was turned toward Nasserism and against the West.

Stymied in the UN Security Council, where England and France had a veto, Dulles pressed the General Assembly to call on them to withdraw their forces. A resolution was approved, and they were out within a week. What was left to contend with was Israel's occupation of the Sinai. Ben-Gurion talked tough. Dulles and Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson answered with the creation of a UN international peacekeeping force, and Pearson warned, "You run the risk of losing all your friends." Tiny Israel was almost entirely reliant on the good graces of Western powers that were, in turn, beholden to the United States. Israel, it is true, enjoyed Congressional support, especially from the Senate majority leader, Lyndon Johnson, who was surrounded, like most Democratic leaders, by party bosses and influential Jewish friends—Abe Fortas, Arthur Krim—whose liberalism seemed of a piece with the saga of Zionism. Yet Dulles would not be moved. Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai was an American interest.

In what Tyler calls the administration's "finest hour," Eisenhower went on television in February 1957 and acknowledged that Israel should have free shipping to Eilat. He spoke of the UN charter and of UN forces ensuring free navigation. But of Israel seeking "something more," Eisenhower added: "Should a nation which attacks and occupies foreign territory in the face of United Nations disapproval be allowed to impose conditions on its own withdrawal?" Dulles told Israelis that they "were on the verge of a catastrophe." (Tyler's narration, here and in the rest of the book, is convincing if slightly overdramatized: "Dulles could see that he was up against a lioness.... [As he] walked [Foreign Minister Golda] Meir to the door, he could not let her have the last word.")

That was that, and Ben-Gurion knew it. By the end of March 1957, Ben-Gurion had withdrawn Israeli forces from the Sinai, though with gains Israelis did not think trivial at the time. The port of Eilat was opened to Israeli shipping, which meant oil from the shah's Iran. It also meant flourishing relations between decolonized sub-Saharan African countries like Nkrumah's Ghana and "socialist" Israel, which dispatched military and agricultural advisers (often the former in the guise of the latter).

On the whole, this turned out to be Israel's golden age of state building, Hebrew cultural innovation and immigrant absorption. In a bittersweet twist of fate, a good many of the immigrants from North Africa were stampeded to Israel by the reaction of Arab governments to the 1956 invasion. The UN placed buffering troops in the Sinai, "the umbrella," as Abba Eban complained to UN Secretary General U Thant in the aftermath of the 1967 war, that would be taken away "as soon as it begins to rain"; it would indeed take another war for Israel to prove it could not be destroyed. Still, occupation of the Sinai would hardly have made new wars less likely. As Israelis learned bitterly in 1973, occupation made war inevitable.

Tyler's account of Eisenhower and Ben-Gurion is clearly meant to trigger a thought: why has no subsequent president approached matters quite this way? Should we assume that Israel will always be a third rail—that the Israel lobby

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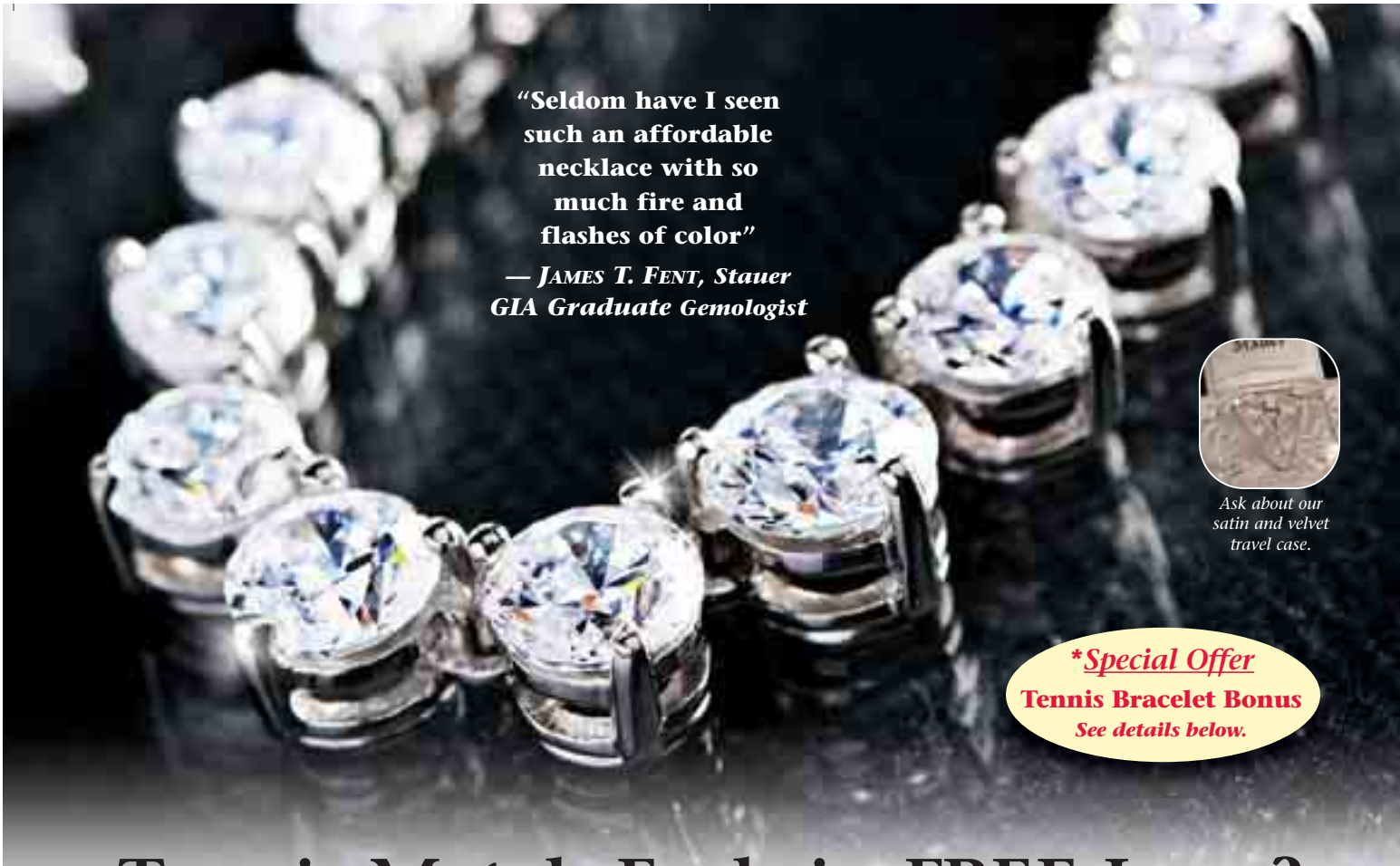
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has made American pressure incredible? Tyler takes for granted that such questions fuel growing skepticism, in and out of Israel and the Palestinian territories, about the prospects for any new peace negotiations. (Disclosure: Tyler interviewed me in 2005 when he was getting started on his book.) Whether or not the Palestinian Authority creates a unity government—or Israel reaches a deal with Syria over the Golan—skeptics assume that Israel's government will continue to come up shy of an acceptable offer to the Palestinians, especially regarding the settlements and Jerusalem. The only hope, though Tyler is tactful about spelling it out, is for a US president willing to make Israeli elites fear diplomatic isolation more than they fear the collapse of national solidarity. Diplomacy, to use the phrase of CBS's veteran correspondent Bob Simon, means putting Israelis "into a panic."

Occupation made war inevitable, as the Israelis would bitterly learn in 1973.

Tyler does not get into this, but we must be clear about the dynamic here, since new generations of correspondents have a way of writing about Israeli politics without his, or Simon's, sense of history. The problem is not some spontaneous drift "to the right" in Israel owing to, say, Hamas's missiles or Ahmadinejad's threats. Israel, after all, has been integrating these territories for forty years; Hamas did not even exist during the first twenty. Of course Israelis distrust Arab intentions, and vice versa. But although Tyler doesn't get into this, polls have shown for many years that a slight majority of Israelis would want to do a deal anyway—actually, a large majority of globalist professional and entrepreneurial elites in greater Tel-Aviv. Assume peace with Palestine, and the lives of Israelis on the coastal plain will change, if at all, for the better. The problem is that the Israeli population of greater Tel-Aviv is a decreasing majority relative to Jewish settlers and Orthodox residents of Jerusalem—call them "Judeans"—and the less well-educated Mizrahi and ultranationalist Russian immigrants who tend to support them. The Israeli right does not oppose a deal the way residents of New Hampshire oppose an income tax. For them, Greater Israel and a policy of deterrence is a way of life, inextricably bound up with sustaining a "Jewish" state—not only against Palestine but in spite of Israel's Arab minority, a fifth of its citizens.

"Judeans," in other words, have developed a world apart—theocratic, militant, tribalist—though many of them, in fact, are wards of the state, supported by state-supplied settlement infrastructure, family allowances and religious schools. (Just after Obama's speech, I watched one strapping settler tell Israeli television that the American president had been very professional and good on human rights but that he'd quoted the Talmud, and if he'd really read it he'd know that the land of Israel belongs to the people of Israel.) Judeans may half believe that one fine morning Iran's mullahs will accept the incineration of Tehran and Qom for the pleasure of incinerating Tel-Aviv. Yet when they speak of existential threats, what they actually fear is the return of a couple of million Palestinian refugees to East Jerusalem and West Bank towns, transforming the city into an Arabic-speaking megalopolis, much as Tel-Aviv is a Hebrew-speaking one. They fear Arab rights in the state of Israel—and the very concept of an inclusive Israeliness. They regard Palestinian nationalism, in fact, much the way Arabs on the coastal plain in 1948 regarded Zionism, as bound to bring a flood of immigrants that will overwhelm their way of life.

So no Israeli leader, Tyler knows, will confront Judeans, many of them armed with automatic weapons, for the sake of Palestinians—who, Benjamin Netanyahu warns, just might fire missiles at Ben-Gurion Airport. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Fatah's Mahmud Abbas reportedly got stuck in talks over such matters as the town of Ariel, smack-dab between Ramallah and Jenin; the status of Jerusalem; and Palestinian refugees—always the five-foot leap over a seven-foot pit. Why should Olmert have conceded things that would tear Israel apart?

On the other hand—so Tyler's story of Dulles instructs—how long can any Israeli leader dare to defy an America administration that would lead the Western powers with a plan of its own, rooted in what Obama called "interests" of its own? Tyler might have added that Israeli moderates need the specter of American abandonment—of diplomatic isolation leading to economic isolation, a grave threat to Israel's high-tech economy—to confront Judeans and win back at least the Russian Israelis, who did not leave the Soviet Union to live in a little Jewish Pakistan.

But what, then, of the Israel lobby? Dulles, *shmulles*? Actually, the idea that presidents have been trapped by American Jewish pressure—and that Obama is bound to be—does not stand up to Tyler's history. It is better to rely on the taxonomy he implies, even if the intersecting categories are not airtight and every administration is not just one thing or another.

First, we might categorize presidents according to their knowledge of the region—if not their subtlety about the Arab world, their sophistication about the developing world more generally—as compared with, say, a Manichaean ideology in which preemption of dark forces takes precedence over any peace, which could anyway never be trusted. The latter view was hammered into a platform by neoconservatives during the late 1970s—one that cast America in a perpetual fight against evil (serially, "evil empire," "radical evil," "axis of evil") and cast Israel as America's biggest aircraft carrier. Second, we might categorize presidents as relatively strong or weak. Do they have broad popularity and reliable Congressional support for their agenda, however modest, or does presidential popularity fluctuate with media-hyped judgments of their efficacy or ineffectuality, or their virtues or peccadilloes, while each Congressional action hinges on tough votes? Finally, do presidents have a peculiarly soft spot for Israel, a penchant for seeing the Jewish state as a tribute to freedom or the answer to an ingenuous religious impulse—as natural to the Middle East as the Holocaust museum is to the Mall or "Jerusalem" is to Baptist hymns? Or do presidents see Zionism admiringly enough but mainly through the prism of the practical security problems Israeli leaders say they have?

Eisenhower—Tyler's hero, in a way—might be classified as sophisticated, popular and focused sincerely on Israel's security. (Eisenhower's army liberated the death camps, after all.) Kennedy can be classified pretty much the same way. Both administrations wanted to keep the region calm and were mainly set against Israel's acquiring nuclear weapons. They were certainly unwilling to indulge Zionism's irredentist claims.

The first shift came with President Johnson, especially after the Six-Day War, when his power was still great. But Johnson's ignorance of the Middle East, made worse by Vietnam-induced paranoia, was twinned with peculiar affections for liberal and Jewish allies—not just Fortas and Krim but Arthur Goldberg and the New York bankers Abe Feinberg and David Ginsburg—who prompted him to throw his considerable po-

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litical strength directly behind Israel's cause. At first, as reciprocal escalations in May 1967 seduced Nasser into reimposing a blockade on the Strait of Tiran, Johnson tried to restrain Israeli forces and deal with the matter by international action. Then, after Israel's mobilization was followed by a shocking victory, Johnson tried to bask in its reflected glory. He delivered Israel its first Phantom jets, opening decades of codependent relations between the IDF and the Pentagon. He backed Israel's interpretation of UN Resolution 242, which nurtured its hope of keeping much of the conquered land and all of Jerusalem. "Johnson and Rusk," Tyler writes, "faced a choice: support Israel's occupation strategy or demand a full withdrawal. There was very little debate, at least in the White House. Johnson believed that Nasser had provoked the war, and though Israel had ignored his pleas to avoid a rush to combat, Johnson acceded to Israel's desire on how to play the postwar diplomacy."

The second shift came with President Nixon and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger, who leveraged Johnson's position to the hilt. Tyler quotes Kissinger, the closest thing his story has to a villain: "Our objective is always, when the Soviet Union appears, to demonstrate that whoever gets help from the Soviet Union cannot achieve its objective, whatever it is." Earlier Tyler writes:

> Was there a distinction between defending Israel and defending her 1967 conquests? It was a question that Nixon, too, regarded as important. But Kissinger, the diplomatic practitioner who admired subtlety in foreign policy, dismissed this as irrelevant "fine-tuning."

It was Kissinger, Tyler argues, who initiated a pattern of standing up to the Soviets, ignoring the Arab states, neutralizing State and Pentagon skeptics and (by contrast) befriending Israel's diplomats and appeasing Israel's Congressional advocates—people like, most notably, Henry "Scoop" Jackson, the Democratic senator from Washington. Kissinger provided the open door for the lobby to push on.

The turning point, Tyler stesses, was not the 1973 war but a meeting that might well have prevented it. The summer before, Brezhnev was visiting San Clemente on a kind of détente victory tour. Sleepless, he called Nixon and Kissinger to a late-night meeting and pleaded for a US-Soviet approach to resolving the Israeli-Arab conflict, arguing that another regional war would throw the superpowers into a potentially nuclear confrontation. He suggested broad principles: guarantees for Israeli security and an end to attacks on Israel from Arab territories, safeguards for Israeli shipping and Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders. "If we can get agreement on these principles, we can then discuss how to use any influence on the contending parties," Brezhnev said.

But by then the United States was Israel's major arms supplier. Nixon, who fancied himself Eisenhower's protégé, allowed that the United States did not "owe anything to the Israelis." Yet Kissinger prodded Nixon to reject the overture. Both were convinced that Israel had an overwhelming military advantage to preserve the status quo; Nixon was embattled in Watergate, and Kissinger argued that the last thing the administration needed was a fight with Senate Democrats over Israeli security. His enthusiasm for Israeli power was natural for a Jewish refugee who had been part of the US Army's occupation of Germany. (He was a German interpreter in the counterintelligence corps.) What Kissinger did not know was that Brezhnev had intimate knowledge of Anwar Sadat's preparations for retaking the Suez Canal by force of arms.

Kissinger had been so certain of Israel's superiority that when an Arab attack was imminent, he warned Prime Minister Golda Meir not to take pre-emptive action. But after a week of horribly bloody battles, it became clear that the IDF would only slowly gain the upper hand. The IDF had lost fifty planes, 500 tanks and 3,000 soldiers, and Meir felt the need to put Israel's nuclear forces on alert. At that moment, the United States faced the choice of working with the Soviets to impose a cease-fire and lay down the "principles" of a regional settlement, or of resupplying the IDF in a massive airlift and putting off a cease-fire until Israel could fight its way back to a military advantage. Kissinger chose the latter course, even daring to put US nuclear forces on alert when Brezhnev threatened to intervene in defense of Egypt's entrapped Third Army. After this, Tyler implies, the US-Israeli alliance was forged in blood.

Tyler's Kissinger seems true, on the whole. Kissinger did strike the Manichaean template that spread among politicians and reporters in the 1970s, representing Israel as the US ally and "strategic asset" in the region. (The State Department's traditional client Saudi Arabia made things easy by unleashing an oil embargo against the West.) After Kissinger, pressuring Israel seemed something like a basketball coach foolishly demoralizing his slightly brazen power forward. Still, there are some episodes left out of Tyler's narrative that would mitigate any one-sided portrait. Israeli air power, responding to Kissinger's request, actually did help save King Hussein's neck in 1970, when Jordan was invaded by Syria during Black September. Jimmy Carter's eventual Camp David initiative would have been unimaginable without Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy, which produced disengagement agreements with Egypt and Syria.

Indeed, the second interim agreement with Egypt, which saw Israeli cargoes pass through the Suez Canal for the first time, never would have been consummated had Kissinger not gotten tough with Israel. (I covered this period, contributing reports from Jerusalem to *The New York Review of Books*.) Yitzhak Rabin's government had refused to withdraw the IDF behind the Sinai's Mitla Pass. Kissinger, now running foreign policy for Gerald Ford, announced a "reassessment," during which time new arms agreements with Israel were suspended. Thousands of Israeli rightists, led by the settlers' group Gush Emunim, took to the streets, shouting "Jew boy! Jew boy!" at Kissinger: the organizer of the airlift was now a traitor to their dream of Greater Israel. (All of this is missing from Tyler's account.)

It was precisely during the period of the reassessment that seventy-six senators, led by Scoop Jackson (and his protégé Richard Perle), delivered a letter to the White House supporting Israeli claims. AIPAC had been formed in 1953, but it came into its own with this letter, which, hoisting Kissinger with his own anti-Soviet petard, made détente its foil. (Perle had been the moving force behind the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which, in effect, made détente hinge on Soviet Jewish emigration—a kind of dry run for hounding Kissinger on Israel, too.) It all seems so quaint now, Kissinger's fight with the neocons over who was overreacting enough to Soviet power.

Under the radar of the American media, however, Israeli political parties were having a fight of their own over who would overreach more in supporting West Bank settlement activities. From 1972 to 1983, mostly under Labor governments, the number of Jewish settlers in Jerusalem climbed from about 8,500 to more than 75,000. In 1977 Begin's Likud won power, and Gush Emunim went to work for real: 2,000 West Bank settlers became 6,000 by the time the Camp David accords were signed. President Carter—relatively sophisticated,

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with no particular softness for Israelis but politically weak and desperate for Jewish support in his primary campaign against Ted Kennedy—insisted that he had secured a freeze on settlements from Begin for as long as Camp David negotiations continued. He won an Israeli concession that Palestinian autonomy would lead to their acquiring "legitimate rights." But Begin double-crossed Carter and virtually dared him to fight with Israel's Congressional supporters as the 1979 Democratic primaries approached. By the time Ronald Reagan took office, there were something like 10,000 settlers.

President Reagan, for his part, called the settlements an obstacle to peace, urged on, by turns, by Alexander Haig and George Schultz. But nobody believed they meant it. Reagan left Sadat out on a limb, which may well have guaranteed Sadat's assassination. Reagan's team, meanwhile, was prepared to unleash Saddam's Iraq against Iran. There was talk of reviving a Jordan option, with King Hussein managing a federation with Palestine; but there was no heart to oppose Israeli retaliations against PLO guerrillas in southern Lebanon or, ultimately, Israel's catastrophic invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Reagan was a dream come true for the settlers: wildly popular, simple-minded, vaguely messianic and surrounded by Jewish neocons and Hollywood friends. By the time he left office, there were around 100,000 settlers outside Jerusalem and about 200,000 inside.

Curiously, Tyler gives rather short shrift to perhaps the biggest fight over settlements. After the Gulf War in 1991, Reagan's successor, George H.W. Bush, and his secretary of state, James Baker ("Fuck the Jews; they don't vote for us anyway"), threatened to withhold loan guarantees if Israel did not promise not to use the funds to settle Russian Jews in the West Bank. This occasioned AIPAC's most chilling show of force: a thousand volunteers stormed the Capitol in advance of the 1992 election. As it happens, the town of Ariel, which would become one of the biggest bones of contention between Olmert and Abbas, was largely populated by immigrant Russian Jews during this time. Ariel Sharon, then housing minister, picked up about 4,000 from the airport and plunked them down in the Samarian hills.

Clearly, I cannot do justice here to all the sordid details Tyler patiently recounts—much less to the ones he glosses over. I will say that the closer we get to the present, his book reads less like history and more like old news. Bill Clinton advanced the Oslo agreements, even cajoling Netanyahu into an interim deal on Hebron. His "bridging parameters" from December 2000 still form the spine of any American plan. But Clinton lacked "discipline" and needed Congress too much during the Lewinsky scandal. George W. Bush was, in our matrix, a replay of Reagan. You won't learn more about Clinton's fumbles than you learned from Robert Malley and Hussein Agha's essays in *The New York Review of Books*, or more on Bush than from, say, the pages of this magazine.

Where does *A World of Trouble* leave us? Tyler could not have anticipated Obama when he started writing, but something about his review of Middle East "trouble" seems vaguely "back to the future." Not since Eisenhower has there been a president with the necessary combination of attributes to reintroduce the idea of a regional settlement along lines determined by the great powers. America may be diminished in its own eyes, given the Iraq disaster, the financial crisis and the spreading insurgency in Afghanistan. But to Israelis—whose city-state earns less, and is somewhat smaller in habitable area and population, than greater Los Angeles—America and Europe are the world: markets, universities, culture, friendship, arms. Israel is a local military power, well entrenched in what Eisenhower called America's military-industrial complex. But Israel's actions in the territories have never been popular at the Pentagon, and the recent Gaza operation might be said to have violated every principle in Gen. David Petraeus's counterinsurgency handbook. Friends don't let friends drive drunk.

Obama has worldly sophistication and a supportive European Union, an unprecedented mandate and even something Ike did not have, the affections of a majority of American Jews. Indeed, a recent J Street poll reveals that more than 70 percent of American Jews support Obama and a two-state deal pretty much like the one negotiated at Taba eight years ago. (J Street, a peace lobby backed largely by the progressive American Jews AIPAC has alienated, grew in parallel with the Obama campaign.) Against this trifecta, it will be hard to flog Israel's role in a clash of civilizations—a view of the world Obama all but denounced in Cairo.

None of this guarantees Obama will make the most of his opportunity. He is doing his best, clearly, to honor and attract the Islamic world. He has solidly endorsed a Palestinian state and an end to settlements. But if he's digested Tyler's implicit instruction, he'll quickly get beyond framing the peace process as a facilitated negotiation between Israel and

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Palestine, much as he got beyond the appeal for "bipartisanship" with Congressional Republicans. America in the Middle East is not some Dr. Phil, lively, well intentioned and—how did former Secretary Powell foolishly put it?—not wanting peace "more than the parties themselves." America has skin in the game. So do Europe and the neighboring Arab states. They must all want peace more than the Israelis and Palestinians, who are chronically distrustful of each other, trapped by their fanatics, and whose leaders cannot resist the demagogy of the vendetta.

The time has come, in other words, for Obama to stipulate and conduct a public worldwide campaign for an American plan, not just an American vision. The broad terms of the plan will surprise nobody: we are not talking about the price of a rug in the bazaar; Israel is not just Palestine's cross, and Palestine is not Israel's internal affair. And there can be no peace without outside commitments: NATO committing to include Israel; Egypt and Jordan committing Palestine peacekeepers, investment capital and a sympathetic press. The United States can have no leverage with Iran, therefore no orderly exit from Iraq, without a working partnership with the Arab League.

"America will not turn our backs," Obama said in Cairo, "on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity and a state of their own." The whole Middle East, with the span of a continent, is roiled by this conflict. In the background of Tyler's foreground, Obama knows, are the world's largest proven reserves of oil and dollars, teens and violence. There is a burgeoning Arab middle class opening to the West, in Fez, Tripoli and Amman. But they are surrounded by restless undereducated people governed only by mosques and fathers where state security services leave off. Obama's is the face of a more progressive globalization, but world economic stresses could make the mosques, the fathers and their acolytes only more volatile. The status quo, in any case, means the triumph of the settlers and Hamas. And it is all too easy to imagine the sad follow-on chapters to Tyler's sad chronicle. ■

Seed Projects

by MARCELA VALDES

When it was published in Spanish in 2006, Alejandro Zambra's novel *Bonsai* filled just ninety-four generously spaced pages, and its recent English translation by Carolina De Robertis stretches only to eighty-three. Still, each of these volumes should be considered a marvel of book design and production since in interviews the author has let slip that his original text ran only to forty sheets. Rather than shrink in its conversion to bound covers, as most manuscripts do, Zambra's text has swelled—and its effect on the world of Chilean literature has been entirely disproportionate to its size. As the venerable Santiago newspaper *El Mercurio* commented in April 2008, "The publication of *Bonsai*…marked a kind of bloodletting in Chilean literature. It was said (or argued) that it represented the end of an era, or the beginning of another, in the nation's letters."

Reading the book a continent away, I would never have predicted such a fuss, though *Bonsai* is a delightful work. A love story that's both wry and melancholy, the novel opens in 1980s Santiago, at a study session turned party, where textbooks give way to vodka and two university students fall casually into bed. "Julio didn't like that Emilia asked so many questions in class," Zambra writes, "and Emilia disliked the fact that Julio passed his classes while hardly setting foot on campus, but that night they both discovered the emotional affinities that any couple is capable of discovering with only a little effort."

Such knowing, cynical observations save the love story of these twentysomethings from sentimentality, and Zambra keeps the zingers coming as he traces the development of Julio and Emilia's "conceited intimacy," which allows them to feel not only loved but also "better, purer than others." The relationship withers by page 35, at which point the novel—this little book has been insistently presented as a full-fledged novel in Spain and Latin America—turns poignant. The brief romance, brimming with heartfelt confessions and adolescent posturing, emerges as the one great love of Julio's dispirited life.

Julio and Emilia's story "is really a story of illusions,"the novel observes, and what makes it dazzling is Zambra's nuance. *Bonsai* doesn't just mock its characters' fantasies and deceptions; it also shows how such chimera are necessary to their happiness, and their undoing. Julio and Emilia are literature majors—that is to say, lovers of well-wrought lies—and one of the novel's most amusing scenes occurs when they decide to read *In Search of Lost Time* as foreplay. At the budding of their relationship, Julio had spurred the romance by claiming to have read all seven volumes of Proust's masterpiece when he was only 17. Emilia had sweetly reciprocated the lie. So when the lovebirds actually open *Swann's Way*,

> They both had to pretend that their mutual read was, strictly speaking, a reread they had yearned for, so that when they arrived at one of the numerous passages that seemed particularly memorable they changed their tone of voice or gazed at each other to elicit emotion, simulating the greatest intimacy.

It's a charade that neither Julio nor Emilia can sustain for long: 372 pages into the epic, the couple abandons Proust, and each other. Lies speed love, *Bonsai* seems to say, and corrode it.

Before *Bonsai*, Zambra published two volumes of poetry, and he's said that *Bonsai* began as a third collection of verse that developed into a novel. This history may explain the novel's minimalist style and formal cleverness. (Zambra uses synecdoche and symbol to marvel-

OMAR FAÚNDEZ

Alejandro Zambra

Bonsai
By Alejandro Zambra.
Translated by Carolina De Robertis.
Melville House. 83 pp. $13.

La vida privada de los árboles
By Alejandro Zambra.
Anagrama. 117 pp. 12 euros.

Marcela Valdes is a contributing editor at Publishers Weekly. *Her last piece for* The Nation *was "Alone Among the Ghosts."*

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ous effect.) What's most unusual about the book, however, is its insistence on breaking the reader's suspension of disbelief. Like a modern Henry Fielding, Zambra makes no effort to disguise his literary devices; rather, he highlights them at every turn. Here, for example, are the novel's oft-quoted opening lines:

> In the end she dies and he remains alone, although in truth he was alone some years before her death, Emilia's death. Let's say that she is called or was called Emilia and that he is called, was called, and continues to be called Julio. In the end Emilia dies and Julio does not die. The rest is literature.

Elsewhere Zambra warns that other walk-ons "don't matter, they're secondary characters." He toys with possible character names and indicates when a woman will "disappear forever from this story." His writer-narrator even confesses his difficulties with plotting: "I want to end Julio's story, but Julio's story doesn't end, that's the problem."

If *Bonsai* were a building, it'd look rather like the Centre Georges Pompidou, all its mechanicals exposed and painted bright primary colors rather than hidden behind the walls. Zambra wants not only to explore conflict and emotion but also to revel in the medium that allows him to express these things. As one Chilean critic noted, "Zambra seeks, from the beginning and through diverse means, always to maintain a certain distance between the reader and the narrative, a distance that stresses, precisely, that we are dealing with a literary text and not an imitation or transposition of reality." Such an approach is common enough among poets, but it's rare among contemporary Latin American novelists, and several prominent Chileans loathed his work.

Chief among Zambra's detractors was *Mercurio* critic José Promis, who declared that though *Bonsai* and Zambra's second novel, *La vida privada de los árboles* (The Private Life of Trees), have been sold as novels by Editorial Anagrama, they have no place in the category. On the contrary, Promis wrote, "they step forward…stripped of all the scaffolding that transforms a story into a novel, or at least of how us laymen understand it: as an 'absurd comedy' where 'we're going to pretend like there was a world that was more or less like this.'" This definition of the novel is so narrow as to be laughable—where do futuristic works like *Neuromancer* or grave meditations like *Gilead* fit within such rigid criteria? Promis's final ad-

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monition is equally dogmatic: "Renovators who stay in the [metafictional] form risk being devoured by authentic literature."

Such sermonizing about what constitutes "authentic" novels generally strikes me as specious. From *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy* to *Molloy* and *The Lover*, the world of fiction has always contained many realms, and *Bonsai* is in no more danger of being "devoured" than Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Actually, to judge by public honors, Zambra has done remarkably well. In April 2007, *Bonsai* won a prestigious Chilean prize for the best novel of the year, and that same month Zambra was chosen for the "Bogotá 39," a juried selection of the thirty-nine most important Latin American writers younger than 39. By then, *Bonsai* was already being translated into French, Italian and Greek. And the controversy about whether the book was really a novel and whether it deserved such lavish recognition? It only plumped the book's sales.

Readers who consider Roberto Bolaño the pole star of contemporary Chilean fiction will be jolted by Zambra's little book. For though Zambra has been stamped as the Next Great Chilean Writer in many circles, he's in no way Bolaño's heir. (But then, who is?) Where the heroes of Bolaño's novels are resolutely proletarian, Zambra's characters are mostly downwardly mobile bourgeoisie. (At one point, *Bonsai* even refers to working-class beachgoers as *lumpen*, or riff-raff.) Where Bolaño wrought romantic detective stories showcasing the virtues of courage and integrity, Zambra's protagonists lead mundane lives rife with small deceptions. It's no surprise that Zambra says he reads Bolaño very little. He doesn't care much for Bolaño's literary hero Julio Cortázar, either.

In these tastes, Zambra is indeed the herald of a new wave of Chilean fiction. As the noted critic Javier Edwards of *El Mercurio* has observed, "in the antipodes of long-winded writing, like the negation of a Roberto Bolaño," the minimalist novel has carved out a place in the national letters. Like Beckett reacting to Joyce, the young writers of Chile, who were born in the 1970s during the military dictatorship and who cut their teeth on the satirical newspaper *The Clinic* during the newly recovered democracy, have turned from Bolaño to the bonsai.

Zambra himself fashions a tale from this trend. Near the end of *Bonsai*, Julio meets the antithesis of the young Chilean author, an old novelist named Gazmuri (a clear riff on the real Chilean historian Cristián Gazmuri, whose most famous work is the two-volume series *The History of Private Life in Chile*). Zambra's old writer has published a series of novels "about recent Chilean history," and he needs someone to type up his latest opus, which of course he's written by hand. Sitting in a cafe in the once-posh neighborhood of Providencia, Gazmuri asks Julio, "Do you write novels, those novels with short chapters, forty pages long, that are in fashion?"

"No," Julio responds. "Would you recommend that I write novels?"

Rejected by Gazmuri, Julio attempts to become him by writing and then transcribing the novel he imagines Gazmuri had in mind. But when Gazmuri's book comes out, we see the gulf between Julio's attempt and Gazmuri's own, and Julio turns to a project of "true art": cultivating, from seed, a real bonsai. The Gazmuri novel is thus portrayed as both impossible and unworthy.

The Private Life of Trees also revolves around a struggling writer. Julián is putting the final touches on a novel about a bonsai and is plagued by doubts about its merit. Maybe, he thinks, it would have been better to make a simple record of the conversations he overheard from the bar downstairs? Maybe he should have written a book about the life of an 8-year-old boy during 1984, when Pinochet's dictatorship was still in full force? *Private Life* even presents some of the memories Julián would have used in writing this second, more Gazmuri-like book. In the end, however, Julián decides, "It isn't that he wishes to write that story. It's not a project. Rather, he wants to have written it years ago and to be able to read it now."

There's something lazy about this solution to Julián's dilemma. Indeed, although *The Private Life of Trees* has moments of real sparkle, compared with *Bonsai* the novel feels tossed off. Its digressive structure is wobbly where it should be tight, and its exploration of mature relationships is marred by evasion and sentimentality. Even the novel's metafictional observations feel stale. ("When [Julián's wife] returns the novel ends. But while she doesn't return the novel continues.")

The problem isn't minimalism or metafiction per se; it's Zambra's reluctance to apply to Julián's tender spots the same pressure he brings to bear on those of Julio and Emilia. In interviews, Zambra, who was born in 1975, often mentions that what

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unites his generation of writers is that they are all children of the Pinochet dictatorship; yet the dictatorship figures little in the settings of his books. That period, when handled at all, is always treated obliquely. If anything, his two novels can be read as accounts of well-off people who lived through the dictatorship and were hardly bothered by it at all. Of course, there were many, many such people in Chile, and it would be a pleasure to see Zambra tackle this material with the dry, nuanced eye he showed in *Bonsai*.

Instead he turns to feeble analogy. At its crux, *The Private Life of Trees* turns on a parallel between the vanishing of Julián's wife, Verónica, who goes to art class one evening during the democratic era and never returns, and the murder of political dissidents who were disappeared while the country was under military rule. "I'm the son of a family that has no dead," Julián says to himself during the minutely detailed night he spends waiting for Verónica's return. Other friends, he remembers, had families "where death appeared with pressing insistence"; what he has is Verónica's unexplained absence. Yet between these two kinds of loss lies a world of difference that Zambra never musters the courage to explore. ■

The Prison Dilemma

by ROBERT PERKINSON

Cruel and Unusual
The Culture of Punishment in America.
By Anne-Marie Cusac.
Yale. 318 pp. $27.50.

In his inaugural address, Barack Obama pledged to renew the nation's founding creed, to carry forward "that precious gift, that noble idea…that all are equal, all are free." Some 1.8 million people gathered on the National Mall to hear the new president on that icy January morning. Yet a considerably larger mass—equivalent to adding the population of Boston to the celebration—spent the same day behind bars. For America is not only the land of the free, as the Navy chorus chanted from the presidential dais. It is also, to an extraordinary extent, the land of the unfree, the most incarcerated society on earth.

The United States was not always so locked down. For most of the twentieth century its incarceration rate hovered near one-tenth of one percent, roughly the same as in other industrial free societies. Then, from the early 1970s forward, the federal and state governments began extending sentences, curtailing judicial discretion and restricting early releases. The prison population soared. By the end of George W. Bush's presidency, approximately one out of every 100 adults was in jail or prison, a proportion unmatched in the history of democracy.

During this same period, racial disparities in the criminal justice system have widened. At mid-century, during segregation, the black imprisonment rate was about four times higher than that of whites; by 2005 it was seven times higher. If current trends continue, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in three black men born today can expect to go to prison in his lifetime. For the grandchildren of *Brown v. Board of Education* on the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder, American justice has become more separate and unequal, not less.

Analysts have put forward competing explanations for this severity revolution in criminal justice. Law-and-order conservatives point to elevated postwar crime rates, while critics blame private prison profiteering; unintended policy consequences, like supervised parole, that send tens of thousands to prison for failing a urinalysis; and even the excesses of popular democracy, as exemplified by merciless ballot initiatives like three-strikes laws.

Anne-Marie Cusac aims to synthesize this debate in an ambitious but jumbled new book, *Cruel and Unusual*. Emphasizing the physical pain of punishment and drawing on an eclectic mix of sources, from TV shows to trial transcripts, her study brings a host of fresh ideas to the discussion. Although Cusac has an eye for startling anecdote, her overarching contention that America's "culture of punishment" has sprung from Christian roots ultimately confuses as much as it clarifies. Unwittingly, her book makes a stronger case for alternate explanations for the country's punitive turn than for those she develops herself.

Cruel and Unusual roams widely across time and topic, from the hanging of witches in the seventeenth century to Taser shocks in the twenty-first, from torments inflicted by prison guards to coercive tactics employed by teachers, pastors and military officers. Among the Puritans, Cusac discovers, parents tried to beat "the will" out of their infants, because, as Jonathan Edwards put it, "all are by nature the children of wrath, and heirs of hell." In the 1920s leased prisoners in Alabama "frequently put dynamite caps in their boots and blasted off toes or feet" to escape even greater suffering in the mines. With sections about chain gangs, mental hospitals and lynch mobs, Cusac strings together a disquieting counterhistory of repressive violence, which, she suggests, has been inaccurately omitted from sunnier accounts of evolving disciplinary norms.

Cusac does acknowledge that over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "American punishment slowly left most intentional physical pain behind." The gallows gave way to lethal injection, schoolmasters retired their switches and parents eventually embraced Dr. Spock. According to Cusac, however, this drift from public sanctions of the flesh to the private disciplining of the mind abruptly reversed course in the 1970s. In what historian Philip Jenkins labels the "decade of nightmares," the ghosts of Puritans past suddenly rematerialized. Americans fretted about Satan. *Newsweek* railed against irredeemably "wicked" juvenile delinquents. And anxious, angry voters finally elected Ronald Reagan, whose omnibus crime bills signaled a preference for hard power over soft power at home, just as the MX missile did abroad.

This pugilistic strain in US policy-making coincided with a deep transformation in American culture, Cusac argues. As many Americans recoiled from the upheaval and social experimentation of the '60s, as they fulminated against crime and lost faith in the benefits of social welfare programs, they grew alienated and vengeful. Some flocked to shock thrillers like *The Exorcist* and *Death Wish*, which reveled in pure evil or righteous, blood-soaked vigilantism. Others turned to televangelists like Jerry Falwell, who thundered against drug use, deviant sex and moral degeneration. On the fringes of the ascendant religious right, so-called reconstructionists went so far as to propose the imposition of biblical law, complete with public stoning for idolatry and filial disobedience. Out of this cultural foment, Cusac maintains, the prison state was born.

The transformation of LBJ's Great Society into Reagan's Mean Society has been well

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chronicled, notably by Rick Perlstein in *Nixonland*. But Cusac's version of the story is too neat. She presents *Dirty Harry* as emblematic of '70s sensibilities but ignores anti-establishment countercurrents in films from the era, like *Papillon* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. She draws a line of continuity between Cotton Mather and Pat Robertson, whose gospels of fear, predicated on original sin, encouraged punitive policy-making. But she swerves around the century and a half between the Second Great Awakening and the civil rights movement, when prominent Christians who spoke out on criminal justice tended to stress mercy and redemption over chastisement and damnation.

Old-time religion lies at the heart of this book, but Cusac marshals only scattered and sometimes conflicting evidence for its influence on social and state violence. In a long section on the revival of spanking by modern-day evangelicals, for instance, she reveals that in opinion polls overall public support for child-swatting has plummeted, thus undermining her central premise. Suddenly, homeschoolers wielding their polyurethane "chastening instruments" ("The Means Prescribed by God," according to one brochure) look more like dead-enders than trailblazers.

If Cusac isn't entirely persuasive in arguing that religious zealots are to blame for America's cult of the prison, her wide-ranging survey highlights a number of alternative explanations. She notes that postwar globalization, deunionization and white flight concentrated poverty in central cities, at once incubating crime and eroding suburban sympathies for criminals. From Nixon forward, she points out, conservative politicians have used the figure of the parasitic, child-corrupting "drug fiend" to build support for redirecting resources, from social services to law enforcement, from the "war on poverty" to the "war on drugs"—and with staggering consequences. By 2005 a half-million people were in prison on drug convictions, most of them African-Americans or Latinos—even though, according to government survey data, an estimated 69 percent of regular drug users are white.

However one explains the causes of the prison boom, its costs and consequences aren't difficult to gauge. Corrections expenditures in the United States now exceed $68 billion annually, but scarcely anyone thinks the money is well spent. Even hardliners like political scientist John DiIulio Jr. acknowledge that locking up ever greater numbers of nonviolent offenders, especially drug-only offenders, is doing more social harm than good. Because what sociologists have come to call "mass imprisonment" not only punishes criminals but fractures families and hardens unemployment, many policy-makers are starting to agree with Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy that our criminal justice system is riddled with inadequacies and injustices. "Our resources are misspent," he told the American Bar Association in 2003, "our punishments too severe, our sentences too long."

By spotlighting the injuries inflicted by punishment, *Cruel and Unusual* encourages us to prioritize remedies that could curtail law enforcement abuses and improve conditions of confinement. The ACLU and the Vera Institute of Justice, among others, have proposed a host of sensible policy fixes in these areas, including independent oversight boards, mandatory videotaping of interrogations and use-of-force incidents, and the repeal of the 1996 Prison Litigation Reform Act, which effectively barred inmate complaints from federal court and thus hid prison operations from public view. These recommendations should be implemented, especially because the Bush administration tacitly condoned detainee mistreatment by making extralegal imprisonment and coercive interrogation key weapons in its "war on terror."

Protecting individual arrestees and inmates from acute harm will solve only part of the problem, however. For what makes America's criminal justice system exceptional is not its savagery but its scale. On any given day, 7.5 million people are under criminal justice supervision in the United States. One in fifteen black children goes to bed each night with a parent behind bars. Over the past few decades, hundreds of prisons have been built in the United States but only a handful of new public colleges. To address this larger crisis, more ambitious, politically risky steps will be required. It will mean not just treating inmates more humanely and assisting their re-entry into society but sending fewer people to prison in the first place and letting more of them out. To dispense justice, America's criminal justice system needs to be safer and more softhearted, to be sure, but mainly it needs to be smaller.

On his journey to the presidency, Obama suggested he understood this. In the Senate he co-sponsored the Second Chance Act, which aims to reduce recidivism by providing assistance to former prisoners and their families, as well as legislation to eliminate the racially discriminatory sentencing disparities between crack and powder cocaine. On the campaign trail, he pledged to review and eliminate most mandatory minimum sentences and said he favored treatment over incarceration for drug crimes. "We can be smarter on crime and reduce the ineffective warehousing of non-violent drug offenders," he wrote in an NAACP questionnaire. In *The Audacity of Hope*, he articulated a social democratic view of crime that has been out of favor for forty years. "We need to tackle the nexus of unemployment and crime in the inner city," he wrote. "With lawful work available for young men now in the drug trade, crime in many communities would drop."

Obama has been given the chance to reassert those principles by the freshman Democratic senator from Virginia, Jim Webb, who in March introduced what could be the most important piece of progressive crime legislation in a generation, the National Criminal Justice Commission Act. Although Webb represents a purple state known for harsh penalties (Virginia abolished parole in 1995 and ranks second to Texas in executions), he has spoken out forcefully on criminal justice, which, he argues, "has deteriorated to the point that it is a national disgrace." "We have 5 percent of the world's population [and] 25 percent of the world's known prison population," he noted in a recent floor speech, which means "either we have the most evil people on earth living in the United States; or we are doing something dramatically wrong."

The Webb bill, which has attracted widespread Democratic and scattered Republican support, does not propose specific policy changes. Rather, for the first time since the Johnson administration, it aims to establish a blue-ribbon bipartisan commission to develop a "top-to-bottom" overhaul plan for the criminal justice system. Significantly, the legislation instructs commissioners to investigate minority overrepresentation in the penal system, reconsider the criminalization of drug possession and generally devise reforms that will "reduce the overall incarceration rate while preserving public safety, cost-effectiveness, and societal fairness."

Returning the United States to historical and international norms on drug and prison policy after almost forty years of draconian exceptionalism will be difficult, but Webb's national commission is a good place to start. Congress and the Obama administration are already contending with an ambitious, unwieldy agenda, but if their new regime is to overturn the old, criminal justice cannot be ignored. Americans will not be able to carry forth that "great gift of freedom" and deliver it safely to future generations, as the president says we can, with so many of our people living behind bars. ■

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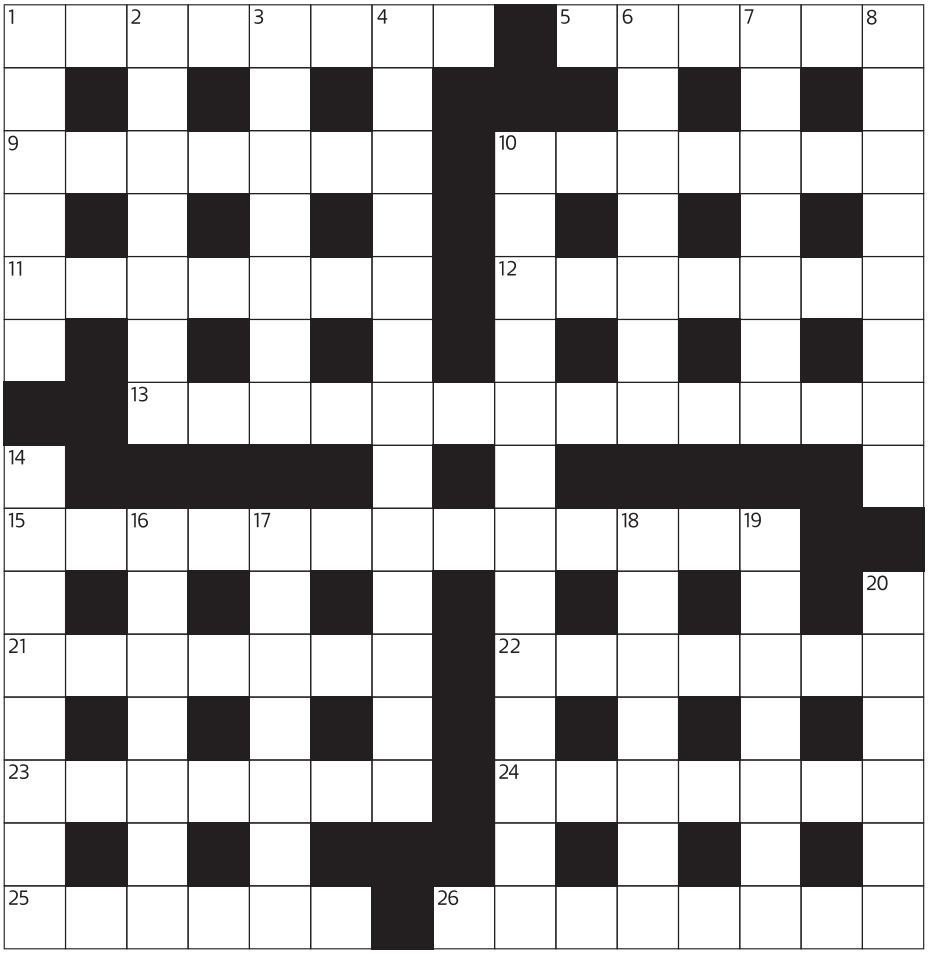

ACROSS

1 Not to act too eager, but stick around a while and give support. (4,4)

5 In bad rainstorms, these let the water down. (6)

9 A couple of treys, for example, make a pretty sad couple. (3,4)

10 By Jove, you have the equivalent! (7)

11 Look at what might give you a licking! It's not all that far above your nose! (7)

12 If you're looking for a scoop, here's a big one! (The medico right around the corner?) (7)

13 Steinbrenner's confused, true as the master of pointillism. (7,6)

15 Those gunmen in the movies? Heavens, that's where you see them! (8,5)

21 Camera I take all over to reveal one country. (7)

22 The Greatest, with two degrees, is a hero of Arabian fiction. (3,4)

23 Sometimes rung by ringers. (Chan gestures in plain sight to make a switch.) (7)

24 Starts as a controversy over some burning issue—and I ingest with some difficulty! (7)

25 They provide wood for craftsmen, as you can see in Calder sculptures. (6)

26 In a state of confusion, Tracy sat... to find a homeless kitty! (5,3)

DOWN

1 Divides into two equal measures what some call heroin, leading a deranged slave. (6)

2 Sounds like it isn't the same old town where you get a way to cook lobster. (7)

3 Support for a good many, with five at a big party, which shows a swaggering display of courage. (7)

4 Primitive transportation to an old witch and Indians (minus 50) being early Phoenicians. (13)

6 A sort of peer let inside, and abundantly supplied. (7)

7 A number get up in a sort of rein. (7)

8 Where you'll find a lot of girls with an advisor, or it yields the answer. (6)

10 Classic betrayer. (5,8)

14 A CIA nest destroyed to make a cattle ranch in Spanish America! (8)

16 Twisted rope, and a quantity changed by a mathematical process. (7)

17 What the cowboy sometimes had to pull, with his famous horse. (7)

18 Contrarian native takes in political web publisher, speaking informally. (7)

19 Jerky, fuzzy cats sip this. (7)

20 Place a wager around a stupid person, and you'll find a real dog! (6)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3175

B	U	R	N	T	O	F	F	E	R	I	N	G	S	
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AN OPEN LETTER TO FRIENDS OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT

DEAR FRIENDS OF LABOR:

The conflict between UNITE HERE and Workers United/SEIU must end. The workers affected by this dispute deserve nothing less. **We seek binding arbitration between the parties, and we ask our friends in the extended labor community to call on UNITE HERE President John Wilhelm to join us at the bargaining table now.**

After months of negotiations and mediation, we offered a proposed resolution to this dispute that would respect each union's organizing jurisdiction, provide a fair division of assets, and resolve representational issues. The offer included approximately $50 million from Workers United — a sum almost three times what HERE initially brought to the merger. Unfortunately, UNITE HERE Hospitality President John Wilhelm rejected our proposal outright and refused to negotiate, escalating hostile actions.

Mr. Wilhelm claims that this fight was initiated by SEIU, but that is false. Rather, the discord came from a mismatch in culture and strategic ideas between UNITE and HERE which made the merger untenable practically from day one. In the aftermath of 9/11, when workers from HERE saw their livelihood threatened by the collapse of the hospitality business, SEIU gave HERE $2 million. SEIU also assisted HERE in organizing drives and even transferred 10,000 hospitality industry members to HERE. HERE was nearly broke when it merged with UNITE in 2005. Despite spending tens of millions of dollars, the post-merger organizing results were weaker than pre-merger, and once healthy joint boards were saddled with financial issues.

John Wilhelm and his allies launched an open, clearly unconstitutional attack last December on the former UNITE, trying to trustee former UNITE joint boards and threatening them with financial ruin. They destroyed the joint authority delegated to the two presidents, John Wilhelm and Bruce Raynor, which was key to preventing unfair domination by either side of the merger. Only after these acts did the former UNITE forces consider leaving UNITE HERE.

Nearly 100,000 workers signed petitions supporting disaffiliation from UNITE HERE and the formation of Workers United. In contrast, Mr. Wilhelm has authorized communications to employers of Workers United members, urging them to escrow dues and deny access to union representatives — prompting employers to stop bargaining for first contracts at newly organized workplaces.

We urge all who care about the Labor Movement to join us in this call for binding arbitration on all outstanding issues so this conflict can cease.

Andy Stern
President
SEIU

Bruce Raynor
President
Workers United

Edgar Romney
Secretary-Treasurer
Workers United

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